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Caring about the British Empire

British imperial activist groups, 1900-1967, with special reference to the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists

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Caring about the British Empire: British imperial activist groups, 1900-1967, with special reference to the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists.

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Claude Fredrick Scott

September 2013

Abstract

This thesis contributes to one of the main debates of British imperial history, the relevance of the Empire to British society. It examines a number of twentieth century imperial activist groups and discusses in detail the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists. It argues that the Junior Imperial League was an important imperially-minded organisation which gave valuable practical support to the Conservative party. It suggests that the imperialism of the League of Empire Loyalists had ideological roots in the imperialist ideas of the late nineteenth century has been overlooked by historians who have perceived it as relevant only to extreme right-wing politics. It suggests that both these groups have been given too little, or the wrong kind of, attention by historians. The first has simply been overlooked and the second has tended to be subsumed into a search for British fascism rather than studied as a specifically imperial body.

The analysis of these two groups, in the general context of imperial group activism, hints at a reading of British imperial consciousness that is more subtle than the one in much current literature. Imperialism was neither ubiquitous nor non-existent. A substantial number of activists in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, estimated to exceed a million, cared about the Empire in various ways and with a range of intensity. Members of imperial activist groups came from all classes, although the leadership of imperial activism was often upper-class. However, imperialism mattered most when it was most 'banal' and most intertwined with a broader political Conservatism. Members of the Junior Imperial League rarely saw their imperialism as controversial or something separate from their broader political vision. They associated it with the governance of the Empire, its defence, trading relationships, education, and Anglo-Saxon feelings of 'kith and kin'

The League of Empire Loyalists revealed a different pattern of imperialism at a time when empire had become much more contested. The LEL mobilized people who saw empire as the salient feature of their own political identity. In many ways their central concerns were similar to those of the Junior Imperial League but their sense of their marginality revealed how far empire had moved from the mainstream of British politics.

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Abbreviations

BCU	British Commonwealth Union
BEL	British Empire League
BEU	British Empire Union
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CPA	Conservative Party Archive
ECG	Expanding Commonwealth Group
EDM	Early Day Motion
EEF	Engineering Employers' Federation
EDU	Empire Development Union
EIA	Empire Industries Association
EPA	Empire Parliamentary Association
ERDC	Empire Resources Development Committee
FBI	Federation of British Industries
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GPO	General Post Office
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
ICL	Imperial Cooperation League
IDL	India Defence League
IES	Indian Empire Society
IFDC	Imperial Federation(Defence) Committee
IFL	Imperial Federation League
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAA	Imperial South African Association
JICL	Junior Imperial and Constitutional League
JIL	Junior Imperial League
LEL	League of Empire Loyalists
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCCC	National Clarion Cycling Club
NUCA	National Union of Conservative Associations
NUCUA	National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OFRC	Overseas Forces Reception Committee
PLBO	Patriotic League of Britons Overseas
RCI	Royal Colonial Institute
SGC	Self Governing Colonies
TRL	Tariff Reform League
TUTRA	Trade Union Tariff Reform Association
UBI	Union of Britain and India
UETL	United Empire Trade League
WGE	Women's Guild of Empire

Introduction

The question of the importance of the British Empire to people living in Britain has been extensively addressed by historians. They have used diverse ways of doing so, exploring, for example, novels, school curricula, consumer products and advertising, cinema, theatre, radio, sexuality and religion. The list of topics is extensive and proposes a sense of the ubiquity of imperialism in Britain that has been contested by other historians who argue that the empire had a lesser, or even a minimal, impact on domestic society. This thesis engages with that debate the content of which is described later in the chapter. In doing so, it considers a perhaps somewhat neglected method by which the importance of Empire can be evaluated. It moves away from considering ways in which the British public were exposed to imperial propaganda and Empire products and from analyses of the imperial content of various cultural media, to seeking evidence about the imperialism of those who were actively committed to the Empire. This is the principal focus of this thesis. It looks at a wide range of imperial activist groups in Britain in the twentieth century whose purpose was openly stated as imperial. Examining their activities, objectives, ideology and membership can help to explain the extent of manifest awareness of, and caring about, the Empire in Britain.

It is likely that those who belonged to imperial activist groups, giving time and money in doing so, were those people who were most zealous about the British Empire. Thus assessing the level of their commitment to imperialism can add a useful dimension to the extent to which empire mattered in Britain. If it were to be the case that imperial activists were not single-minded about their imperialism, might those less imperialistically active be even less concerned about the British Empire? Certainly, imperial activist groups were often both diverse and selective; individual groups were rarely interested in all aspects of the British Empire or in all its geographical constituent parts. It is important, therefore, to consider what was meant by the expression 'the British Empire', to identify the topics that interested members of imperial activist groups and describe how these varied over time. Nor is it necessarily the case that, in the context of their groups, people were solely concerned

with the Empire. They engaged, for example, in social activities, right-wing politics, relationships with the Conservative party, education, business activities and practical support for the defence of the country. Such diversity might be seen to attenuate the view of some historians that British society was steeped in the Empire and their tendency to see the Empire in everything they examine. Sometimes, perhaps, social activities, national defence or business matters were the prime interest of a group labelling itself as imperial.

Furthermore, in discussing the importance of the British Empire to people in Britain it is also important to recognise the varying valency of feelings about the Empire. Thus, where imperialism was present, it can be expressed, at one extreme, subtly, in a commonplace way, and at the other extreme, openly and ‘hotly’. Michael Billig¹ has described ‘banal’, or commonplace, nationalism and its counterpart ‘hot’ nationalism and this idea can be transformed to imperialism and its activists. In considering, therefore, the nature of imperial feelings, it is useful if one can identify their full gamut and weight.

Much of the thesis, therefore, is devoted to two imperial activist groups who represent the respective limits of commitment to, and valency of imperialism, that is, the Junior Imperial League (JIL) and the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL). These two organisations represent two very different kinds of expression of imperialism. They are at two extremes of such activism; the JIL was relatively low key in its imperialism and the LEL virulent and disruptive, and thus together they delimit the range of the intensity of the varied imperialism of activist groups. They have, however, been given relatively little attention by historians, being merely mentioned in passing. By studying them in depth, in the context of other imperial activist groups, this thesis helps us to understand the different extents and varying ways in which people in Britain cared about the Empire.

The thesis challenges the opposing arguments that the Empire was either pervasive in British society or of minimal interest to it. If one examines the ways in which imperial activist groups were constituted, the imperial matters that interested

¹ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London, 1995), p. 43.

them, and how they were pursued, the resulting analysis challenges conclusions by some historians that the British Empire mattered little to domestic society, and by others that it was ubiquitous. Furthermore, it is possible from the limited data available about individual organisations' memberships, to quantify the total extent of imperial activism, an important factor in assessing how much the empire mattered to people in Britain. The same data can address the question of the class nature of interest in the empire. Imperial activist groups contained individuals of all social classes and there is sufficient evidence to suggest the relative strengths of the different classes.

Simply to draw a conclusion about how much the empire mattered would leave unanswered other important questions that can be addressed by an analysis of imperial activist groups. Thus, why did the Empire matter and to whom? How did activist groups perceive the importance of Empire? What policies and imperial themes for preserving and developing the Empire were proposed by groups? What was the social and political nature of the groups? What did groups mean by the 'British Empire' and how did this change? What continuities were there in imperial activism? And how did the 'imperial constituency' change in the twentieth century?

Historiography

Andrew Thompson has observed that in the historiography of the impact of the British Empire on domestic society '[t]here are two widely circulating if perhaps equally flawed' views. One holds that 'most Britons were largely ignorant of or indifferent to the empire' and the other 'that Britain was... saturated by imperialism'.² The former view has been called 'the minimal impact thesis'³ and, in contrast, the latter may be referred to as the 'maximalist thesis'. These two opposing theses form a strongly contested debate in imperial historiography. Stephen Howe includes it as one of a list of twelve main current debates in imperial history and describes it as displaying 'stark polarity between... [the] utter marginality...and [the]

² Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: the Empire in British Politics c1880-1932* (Harlow, 2000), p. 3.

³ Stuart Ward, 'Introduction', in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester, 2001), pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

centrality and ubiquity' of the empire in British domestic society. It is not a debate that he expects to be easily resolved.⁴

The minimalists have largely been concerned with the question of the apparent indifference of the British public to the loss of the Empire after the Second World War and their work precedes that of the maximalists. Stuart Ward has described how several historians have argued that imperial decline mattered very little to ordinary people. Although he concludes that the 'minimal impact thesis' has been broadly shared by British cultural historians dealing with the post-1945 era', he recognises, writing in 2001, that it 'is beginning to attract a degree of critical scrutiny'.⁵ These 'scrutineers' are the maximalists. They reject the idea that the Empire and Britain be treated as separate, disassociated, parts of imperial history and affirm the powerful salience of the Empire in British domestic society using expressions such as 'permeated', 'omnipresent', 'infused', 'core ideology', 'vital aspect', 'pervasive', 'major component', 'profound', 'fundamental' and 'deeply embedded' to describe the effect of the former on the latter.⁶ These descriptors generally emerge from historians who are exponents of the 'new imperial history' which emphasises 'cultural as opposed to political or economic aspects' of the empire.⁷ It is a problematic approach because, in order to justify the thesis that Empire mattered greatly in British society, imperial values contained in cultural

⁴ Stephen Howe, 'Introduction', in *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, ed. by Stephen Howe (London, 2009), pp. 1-16 (p. 11).

⁵ Ward, 'Introduction', in *British Culture*, pp. 4-5. Ward refers to Bernard Porter, David Cannadine, Kenneth Morgan, Arthur Marwick, A J P Taylor, George Boyce and Lord Beloff as exponents of the minimal impact thesis. Andrew Thompson refers to the emergence of the maximalist school in 1984 when John Mackenzie's *Studies in imperialism* series first appeared ('Introduction', in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1-32 (p. 2)).

⁶ Catherine Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. by Sarah Stockwell (Oxford, 2008), pp. 199-218; *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. by Catherine Hall and Sonja O. Rose (Cambridge, 2006); John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Popular Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984); *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John Mackenzie (Manchester, 1986); John Mackenzie, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. 4 The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford, 1999), pp. 212-231; John Mackenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture', in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester, 2001), pp. 21-36; P. J. Marshall, 'Imperial Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23:3 (1995), 379-394; *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. by Sarah Stockwell (Oxford, 2008); Antoinette Burton, 'Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating "British" History', in *Cultures of Empire: A Reader*, ed. by Catherine Hall (Manchester, 2000), pp. 137-153; Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-65* (Oxford, 2005).

⁷ Howe, 'Introduction', in *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, p. 2.

media are sometimes assumed to be readily absorbed by audiences and readers,⁸ about which I will say more later.

The incompatible theses that the imperialism was either ubiquitous in or, on the other hand, almost entirely absent from, British culture, might be said to give insufficient recognition to the complexity of empire and society. Andrew Thompson has argued that there 'was never likely to be any single or monolithic imperial culture in Britain'. Britons were neither steeped in imperialism nor ignorant or indifferent to it; the Empire's influences on British society were more complex and diverse than that.⁹ Thompson is therefore able to conclude that the 'ways in which imperialism influenced the 'domestic' history of modern Britain' were 'diverse' although he recognises that this is a minority view that 'may be swimming against the historiographical tide'.¹⁰ It is a view, however, that is also held by Stephen Howe who has suggested that 'imperialism and empire meant many different things in British political discourse to different people at different times'. Howe also, like Bernard Porter, warns against perceiving the ubiquity of empire: 'things...may not necessarily be associated with Empire [but] could...exist quite independently of it'.¹¹ By analysing imperial activist groups, this thesis develops the argument that imperialism in British society was complex and diverse, not simply either pervasive or minimal.

Imperialist activist groups have not received much attention from historians. Although a few historians have published work that deals with a number of groups, most who have written about imperial activist groups have looked only at single groups. John Mackenzie and Andrew Thompson¹² are in the former category and have used a broad approach. Reese has described relationships between the Royal Colonial Institute and other groups, such as the Imperial Federation League, the

⁸ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2001), p. 322.

⁹ Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: the Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow, Pearson Longman, 2005), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, p. 241.

¹¹ Stephen Howe, 'Empire and Ideology', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. by Sarah Stockwell (Oxford, 2008), pp. 157-176 (pp. 161-2).

¹² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; Thompson in *Imperial Britain* and 'Thinking Imperially? Imperial Pressure Groups and the Idea of Empire in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1994).

United Empire Trade League and the League of the Empire but does not analyse them *per se*.¹³ Andrew Marrison's interest is in 'protectionist businessmen' and empire and to do so he has examined, *inter alia*, the Tariff Reform League, the Empire Industries Association and the British Commonwealth Union.¹⁴ He argues that, even though it was growing in strength, 'until 1929...business pressure was remarkably unsuccessful' in bringing about tariff reform.¹⁵ Matthew Hendley analyses the changes wrought by the First World War on imperial activism and has written extensively about three groups: the League of the Empire, the Victoria League and the National Service League, using them to illustrate his argument that 'patriotic and imperialist' organisations survived the First World War but they 'emphasized different characteristics from those displayed before the war' by 'play[ing] a vibrant if reduced role' that expressed 'a gentler version of imperialism'.¹⁶

Bernard Porter, in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, makes glancing reference to many of the earlier groups but does not evaluate them except to argue that they illustrate the burgeoning of imperial propaganda in the early years of the twentieth century. John Mackenzie, however, has analysed imperial propaganda much more closely than Porter and it is the theme of one of his considerable number of books and articles. In a chapter in *Propaganda and Empire*, he looks at what he calls 'imperial propaganda societies' founded between the middle of the nineteenth century and the First World War. It is the most wide-ranging survey of imperial activist groups in the literature of them and from it he concludes that '[a] whole range of propagandist imperial bodies, conventionally regarded as failures, in fact succeeded in diffusing their patriotic intentions and world view, if not their specific plans of action, through almost every institution in British life'.¹⁷ This is an unequivocal statement about the extent of imperialist activity and one supported by maximalists such as Catherine Hall.

¹³ Trevor R. Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society 1868-1968* (London, 1968).

¹⁴ Andrew Marrison, *British Business and Protection 1903-1932* (Oxford, 1996).

¹⁵ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Matthew Hendley, *Organised Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914-1932* (Montreal, 2012), p. 228.

¹⁷ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 253.

In his important doctoral thesis, Thompson uses a detailed analysis of six groups¹⁸ active in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, to argue that historians have been wrong to emphasise the importance of Britain's dependencies in imperial matters; it was the white Dominions that activists saw as the main element of the British Empire. Thus we see that insofar as imperial activist groups have been looked at collectively at all, they have been used largely as part of a particular argument, not as a main theme. There has been no extensive examination of the ideology, membership and organisation of imperial activist groups throughout the period from the 1860s until after the Second World War. Despite this some historians have been able to reach conclusions about imperial activist groups.

Porter's argument is that 'the empire made [an] uneven and generally superficial impression on British society' but he does not closely examine the role of imperial activist groups in reaching this conclusion, that is, whether they magnified or reduced it.¹⁹ However, he regards Mackenzie's book as particularly important in the debate about the importance of the 'imperial factor in [Britain's] domestic history', even though he dissents from Mackenzie's conclusion that imperial activist groups' propaganda was effective.²⁰

In his thesis *Thinking Imperially?*, Thompson is more circumspect about the impact of imperial activist groups, preferring to use the word 'influence', the assessment of which he regards as ancillary to his thesis. Discussing in detail the affairs of the Navy League, the Tariff Reform League, the Imperial South Africa Association, the Emigration Committee of the Royal Colonial Institute, the British Committee of the Indian National Congress and the Fabian Society, he nevertheless concludes that 'it was the smaller organisations, which operated as special publics [sic], which probably had the most influence on the process of [government] policy formation'. (Thompson defines 'special publics' as groups whose membership was

¹⁸ Although Thompson includes the Navy League in his survey of imperial pressure groups, arguably he is wrong to do so. The Royal Navy was clearly an important element of the British Empire but the purpose of the Navy League was not directly imperial. It was concerned with the scale and deployment of naval resources, not with imperial matters per se, and is therefore not included in the survey in this chapter.

¹⁹ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 318.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 6.

relatively small but who had detailed knowledge and expertise directly relevant to the group's purpose.)²¹ In fields other than forming government policy, such as political debate and party politics, the influence of activist groups is difficult to assess, according to Thompson.²² However, in evaluating the nature of public opinion about the empire, Thompson observes that what it actually was and what imperial activist groups said it was, were not always the same thing, thus complicating any assessment. He questions the validity of the perception of imperial activist groups themselves, that the 'British public was apathetic and indifferent towards its empire'.²³ He firmly concludes, for example, that '[i]t is almost certain that Britain witnessed a spectacular although short-lived period of imperial sentiment during the late 1890s'.²⁴ This sentiment 'flagged', however, at the end of the Boer war to the extent that it was no longer all-absorbing at the time of the general election of 1906,²⁵ a conclusion that is contestable when one considers the proliferation of new imperial pressure groups in the period 1901 to 1918. Indeed, Thompson seems to modify his conclusion by quoting, in his later work, Harris, who wrote that 'popular...serious public discussion of politics in Edwardian Britain was larger in proportion to population than at any time before or since'.²⁶ If this be so, Thompson says, then Edwardian extra-parliamentary [imperial] movements 'must take some credit' in the 'public debate about Empire'. Thompson argues that in this period the enthusiasm of imperialists created extra-parliamentary organisations that increased public discussion of the British Empire, allowed women to participate more fully in politics and brought greater celebration of Britain's imperial achievements. Thus the Empire was a catalyst for creating 'an extra-parliamentary political culture'.²⁷ Arguably, then, the full blooming of popular imperial activism in Britain lasted throughout the period from the 1890s until the First World War. It is important, however, to be aware that this late-Victorian and Edwardian proliferation of imperial pressure groups may be a consequence of an initial catching of the flood

²¹ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 85 and p. 55.

²² Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 87.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 331.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 344.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 345.

²⁶ Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, p. 59, quoting J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914* (London, 1994), p. 196.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 191.

tide of imperial enthusiasm and subsequent attempts to stem its retreat, rather than a crescendo of public interest in imperial matters.

One can conclude from this historiographical survey that in approaching the assessment of how domestic society in Britain was affected by the empire, historians have often mistakenly adopted a binary approach: the empire was either largely irrelevant, or it was pervasive. On occasion, this dichotomy has been uncompromisingly expressed. Thus, for example, Antoinette Burton has dismissed Porter's *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* as 'not "worth arguing with or about"'.²⁸ This illustrates that there is in the debate insufficient recognition that a valid approach to the issue needs to be more subtle: various parts of society were interested in the empire in different ways that varied over time. It is an argument of this thesis that one of the ways this can be explored is by examining imperial activist groups. However, although a number of historians have written about particular groups and drawn useful conclusions, none has considered imperial group activism as a complete social and political phenomenon capable of providing evidence of the attitudes of people in Britain towards the empire.

Methodology and Sources

We will turn, in Chapter 1, to the specific details of individual imperial activist groups but, before doing so, it is useful to outline a methodological framework that helps in understanding and categorising them. In particular, understanding what imperial activists meant when they referred to the British Empire is crucial in any discussion about imperial pressure groups. As Sarah Stockwell has observed, it is an important commonplace that there were several British empires.²⁹ The result of this is that when imperialists used the expression 'British Empire' they were not expressing a uniform, universal meaning. Thus, for example, according to Koebner and Schmidt 'when people spoke [in the 1880s] of the unity of the [British] Empire, they invariably meant the relation between Britain and *all* her colonies and

²⁸ Bernard Porter, 'Further Thoughts on Imperial Absent-Mindedness', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36 (2008), 101-117.

²⁹ Sarah Stockwell, 'Ends of Empire', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. by Sarah Stockwell (Oxford, 2008), pp. 269-293 (p. 271).

dependencies' (emphasis added).³⁰ By 1909, however, Lord Esher declared at the Imperial Press Conference that 'the term "Empire" now referred primarily to Great Britain and the white Dominions'.³¹ In 1945, the white Dominions were still a recognised category of the Empire, along with 'the informal empire of the Middle East... and the... dependent empires in Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and Caribbean'.³² We need to be aware of these shifting meanings and the loose usage of the expression 'the Empire' by activists. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, the compartmentalisation of the British Empire will be taken to be the dependencies, India, and the white Dominions (sometimes referred to in the early part of our period as the self-governing colonies). It will be argued later in this thesis that, until after the Second World War, imperial activists were not much concerned with the dependencies. India was a major concern between the two wars; the white Dominions were the continuous theme throughout the period and it is they who were the 'British Empire' in common parlance. Such an interpretation may help to explain how it was that Britain divested itself of its dependencies so readily, and uncontroversially in domestic politics, after the Second World War; the dependencies had never mattered much to the British public. They mattered more to historians of the British Empire who, as Andrew Thompson has pointed out, 'have grown accustomed to thinking about the British empire, and popular responses to it, in dependent terms', rather than as the 'settler colonies'.³³

The second element is the six main topics that preoccupied imperial activist groups: governance and unification; defence; trade; emigration; imperial sentiment, or 'kith and kin'; and resisting independence. We shall see in the discussion that follows in Chapter 1, that most groups specialised in one, sometimes two, of these topics; few were comprehensively active in all of them. In addition, it is interesting to examine their relevance to the various parts of the Empire. Such an analysis may throw light on the different meanings of the British Empire to people in Britain. Thus, if one asks whether the Empire mattered to people, and if so, how much it

³⁰ Richard Koeber and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 170.

³¹ Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, p. 80.

³² Stockwell, *The British Empire*, p. 271.

³³ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 351. Such a distinction is blurred, perhaps, by the existence of parts of the Empire, such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia that had both dependency and settler elements.

mattered, we can only answer meaningfully if we are clear about what a particular group meant by 'Empire' and the particular topic that interested them. Those, for example, who were concerned to prevent the independence of India, did not of necessity also have to promote, let us say, emigration to Canada in order to be classified as imperial activists. It may well be that to many activists it was only aspects of Empire that mattered, not its totality. This thesis, in surveying imperial activist groups, addresses this question.

The third element describes the principal characteristics of activist groups. In his thesis, Thompson, by considering the different strategies used by activist groups in promulgating their ideas, defines four types: popular pressure groups, such as the Navy League and the Tariff Reform League, who used public opinion to influence government policy; groups who lobbied members of parliament; 'collaborative' groups, for example, the Imperial South Africa Association, who worked closely with relevant officials; and the 'special publics', previously mentioned.³⁴ These are useful categories but they concentrate on groups' methods of communicating with those whom they saw as important in formulating imperial policy. There are broader ways of categorising imperial activist groups; for example, some of them sometimes exhibited more of a social ethos than a political one and yet were relevant to the formation of public sentiment about the British Empire. As Thompson has observed in *Imperial Britain*, 'Britain's political process was undoubtedly influenced and modified by its imperial involvement...for this to be fully appreciated we must look beyond Westminster and Whitehall'³⁵ to other activities including those of activist groups. However, this approach still places exclusive emphasis on the political nature of activist groups and overlooks other characteristics of them. In looking at a wide range of activist groups, therefore, it will provide a more complete picture of them if we consider a number of spectra of activist group characteristics. Thus: to what extent was a group social or political in its activities; general or specific in its ideology and objectives; popular or elitist; small or large; and more of an interest group than a pressure group? These are the characteristics that will be considered in this thesis. In discussing them, evidence will be drawn from primary sources, such as

³⁴ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', pp. 43-61.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 190.

the periodicals of the various groups, and from the secondary sources that form the historiography of imperial activist groups both collectively and individually.

Another aspect of the methodology of the thesis is concerned with the relative importance of empirical evidence and commonly accepted but unconscious notions of empire. Catherine Hall has described how historians ‘have explored the place of empire in metropolitan culture and identity through a wide variety of sources and with different methods’.³⁶ They have researched ‘visual culture...exhibitions...poetry...travel writing...the press, theatre and music hall’ and have used sources such as ‘parliamentary documents...the missionary press...[and] business papers’. Different sources’, she argues, ‘reveal different discourses’.³⁷ Hall also argues that the presence of Empire in metropolitan consciousness cannot be analysed solely by examining narrow empirical evidence in the way that Bernard Porter has done. It must also, she believes, consider subtle feelings about the Empire that arise from ‘background assumptions’ about it and ‘the common sense of the period’ that ‘is never explicitly stated’.³⁸ To exemplify this she discusses William Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair* and concludes that although ‘it is not an imperialist novel, in the sense that it actively promulgates imperial expansion’, it ‘is one in which empire...[is] simply part of everyday social experience’.³⁹ Hall’s assessment of the novel, however, does not tell us how contemporary readers reacted to it and what their views about the Empire were even though they may have readily understood Thackeray’s imperial references. Arguably, popular though the novel was, it tells us as much about the nature of Thackeray’s awareness of Empire as that of his readership. One needs to understand the author’s audience as well as the author himself and the context of his work. A speech delivered alone in front of a mirror, and the same speech made to a cheering audience in the Albert Hall are identical historical documents but differ greatly in how they should be interpreted. The point here is that if we wish to understand the importance of the Empire to the British people, we need to consider as fully as possible their manifest imperial activities. If we place too great an emphasis on the commonplace, almost incidental, proponents of imperial ideas such as novelists, poets, and music hall artists, at the

³⁶ Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p. 205.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 205.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 215.

expense of those directly active in imperialist matters, an incomplete picture is created of the intensity of feeling about the Empire. Bernard Porter, on the other hand, may indeed, as Hall argues, have over-emphasised empirical evidence. A balance between the two approaches can be achieved by discussing a range of imperial feelings that includes those, at one extreme, that were subtle and understated as well as those, at the other extreme, that were powerfully expressed and clearly manifest. A valuable and neglected means of doing so is provided by researching the many imperial activist groups that existed in the twentieth century. They contain a range of expressions of caring about the British Empire. It is a range in which the case studies of the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists determine the two extremes of imperial consciousness between which all other groups can be set. Why, however, are imperial activist groups a valuable source?

If one is to attempt to establish the extent to which the Empire mattered in Britain, why it mattered and to whom, it is useful to construct what might be termed a hierarchy of popular imperial consciousness. This extends downwards from those who cared about the Empire and took action, to those who cared about the Empire but were passive about it; those who were merely aware of the Empire and indifferent to it; and those who were unaware of the Empire. It is very likely that members of imperial activist groups fell into the first two of these categories and were absent from the latter two. By joining the groups they were actively demonstrating that the British Empire mattered to them, albeit in varying degrees. Thus if one is to attempt to answer the question of to what extent the British Empire mattered to domestic society one can do so by assessing the total number of those engaged in imperial activism in Britain. One can also consider the activities and nature of the members of the groups to attempt to answer the other questions posed earlier in this chapter. Thus, by evaluating the totality of collective imperialist activity, this thesis fills an important gap in the historiography of the importance of the Empire to people in Britain. As Hendley has observed, ‘careful study of three separate patriotic and imperial groups from 1914 to 1932... [brings] attention to a neglected but crucial part of British culture during this time’, i.e. ‘organised

patriotism and imperialism'.⁴⁰ By studying twenty seven groups over a greater timespan, this thesis brings a more extensive analysis of organised imperialism and fills gaps in the historiography of the debate about how much the Empire mattered to the British people. It is, however, necessary to define a number of key terms.

The term 'imperial activist group' has been used in this thesis to encapsulate two types of group: 'pressure group' and 'interest group'. It is used to denote a group that is concerned, not principally with the broader concept of imperialism, but specifically with the British Empire. Imperialism is essential to its reason for existing, but its attention is focused tightly on the British Empire. Members of imperial activist groups are actors, not those who are acted upon by, for example, writers, propagandists and advertisers of consumer products of the Empire. One might use the expression 'British Empire activist group' but this is clumsy and therefore the term 'imperial activist group' has been adopted. Pressure groups seek actively to change, or sometimes preserve, some aspect of the affairs of the British Empire. By various means of conveying their objectives, they try to apply pressure to politicians, decision makers and the general public as they campaign for change. Academics are broadly in agreement on a definition of a pressure group. Hamer refers to 'the organisation of electoral power ...for persuading political parties... to promise legislation'; Watts refines this by stating that such a group is not a political party; Grant's definition is broad, describing a pressure group as 'an organisation which seeks...the formulation and implementation of public policy'; and Coxall says that a pressure group 'aims to influence public policy...by lobbying rather than standing for office'.⁴¹ The pressure groups discussed in this thesis all fall within these definitions, although the Empire Crusade, exceptionally, resulted in the formation of a party, the United Empire Party.

Interest groups are not much concerned with change. They are generally content with the Empire as it is (as they understand it), and simply want to celebrate it, learn about it and be its imperial evangelists. The word 'interest' is used here to

⁴⁰ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War*, p. 10.

⁴¹ D. A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Agitations* (Hassocks, 1977), p. vii.; Duncan Watts, *Pressure Groups* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 13.; Wynn Grant, *Pressure Groups and British Politics* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 14.; Bill Coxall, *Pressure Groups in British Politics* (Harlow, 2001), p. 3.

mean being concerned about the Empire, not in the sense of seeking some personal or other return or benefit. This distinction between ‘pressure’ and ‘interest’ is important in assessing how much the Empire mattered. It is not the case, however, that groups were either wholly pressure groups or wholly interest groups; elements of both could coexist in the same group. The same can be said of another categorisation: ‘political’ and ‘social’.

Nevertheless, imperial activist groups were mostly political organisations campaigning for a particular issue and seeking to persuade politicians, as well as the electorate, to support their cause. The British Commonwealth Union is an example of this type of group, as will be evident later in this thesis. Other groups, such as the Overseas Club, had a social ethos and eschewed politics. (The word ‘social’ is used here not to mean the provision of some kind of service to society – although some groups did indeed do that – but to define a group’s internal nature and activities as non-political.) Some groups, such as the Primrose League and the Junior Imperial League, contained both political and social activities and can therefore be particularly useful in exploring the wide-ranging nature of imperial activism. Those activists who applied pressure for political purposes had a different view of the British Empire from those who socialised to express a common interest and delight in the Empire. This thesis explores these differences.

The twenty-seven groups discussed in this thesis are an extensive representation of people interested in the British Empire and provide an analytical resource that is focused on the activities of individuals who cared about the Empire. A major thrust of the thesis is to examine the activities of these individuals, as imperially minded adults, acting collectively and independently of government, in seeking to strengthen, protect or celebrate the British Empire. Imperial groups comprising corporate members, such as the British Empire Producers’ Association and the British Imperial Council of Commerce, have therefore been excluded, as have groups whose members were solely children. Governmental bodies, such as the Empire Marketing Board, have also been excluded.

There are, however, few secondary sources that have looked in detail at imperial activist groups. In books and journals, authors usually refer to them

incidentally and do not probe in depth at the nature of them. Exceptions are found in Hendley's book and in Andrew Thompson's published work. Thompson has also written a PhD thesis and May and Riedi have also written theses on the Victoria League and Round Table respectively.⁴² Primary sources used in the general survey of imperialist activist groups in Chapter 1 include a number of brief first-hand accounts of early groups in *United Empire* and contemporary reports of activities of the groups in *The Times*.

Historians have largely ignored the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists and therefore this thesis has relied heavily on primary sources. A large body of JIL documents in the archive of the Conservative party at the Bodleian Library has been examined and analysed, providing a valuable source of information. It contains minute books of the all main governing committees of the JIL as well as other useful material. The JIL periodicals, *The Imp*, and its successor, *Torchbearer*, are also useful primary sources. Accessible archival material of the League of Empire Loyalists is much sparser. Use has been made of the limited LEL archive at the University of Bath which contains correspondence and other documents about the League's affairs. Chesterton's publications, such as *Sound the Alarm* and *Why I Left Mosley* have been useful, and the LEL's periodical *Candour* provides much information about the LEL's activities and beliefs. *Candour* is still published from premises in Hampshire and it may be that there is useful archival material there. There was no response, however, to a request to examine it. The Beaverbrook papers at the House of Lords Record Office contain references to Chesterton and to the League of Empire Loyalists and have been consulted.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 is a survey of twenty-seven imperial activist groups from their earliest origins in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It considers which parts of the British Empire they were interested in; the imperial themes on which they focused; and their objectives, activities and membership. The range and characteristics of imperial activism are thus established and some general

⁴² Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War*; Thompson, *Imperial Britain*; Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*; Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?'; Alexander C. May, 'The Round Table, 1910-66' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1995); E. L. Riedi, 'Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain: the Victoria League 1899-1944' (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 1998).

conclusions are made about imperial activism in Britain in the twentieth century so that detailed discussion of two groups, the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists, can be placed in context.

The richness of the primary sources allows a detailed description and analysis of the Junior Imperial League. Its importance in the context of imperial activism derives from its foundation in the early years of the twentieth century when public interest in the Empire was arguably at its peak. Chapter 2 explores these early years and describes the JIL's growth to 100,000 members by 1914, its claim to be an effective force and the low-key nature of its imperialism. Chapter 3 deals with the governance and membership of the JIL, describing the growth, decline and class structure of its membership in the inter-war years as well as its relationship with the Conservatives, the party of Empire, and how it reflected the social and political changes of the period. The League's activities, ideology and impact form the content of Chapter 4 in which its imperialism and its usefulness as a Tory party resource are discussed.

Chapter 5 describes the membership, ideology and activities of the League of Empire Loyalists, including its relationships with the right-wing of the Conservative party and the methods it used to publicise its strong support for the British Empire. Because of Chesterton's pre-war association with Mosley's British Union of Fascists, the LEL has generally been seen by historians and other writers as a fascist organisation. Chapter 6 discusses this and argues that such a conclusion should not be allowed to mask its strongly, and actively, held imperialist beliefs.

In any discussion about how much imperialism mattered the question of what is meant by 'British Empire' is an important one and this is dealt with in Chapter 7 using as a structure for doing so, *Imperialism* by Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, a valuable and yet neglected source.

Chapter 7 also examines the changing nature of imperial activism in Britain in the twentieth century in terms of its political and social nature, the geographical areas of the Empire favoured by activists and the principal themes of imperial governance, defence and trade. It also addresses a number of general issues about

imperial activist groups: the social classes that cared most about the British Empire; the specific imperial themes that were important to activists and how they changed over time; and the declining prevalence of imperial activism. The chapter also argues that the JIL and the LEL lie at the extreme ends of the range of imperial activist groups: the former displaying ‘banal imperialism’ and the latter ultra-imperialism. Thus, the JIL was an imperial interest group that enjoyed and celebrated the Empire, expressing its imperialism in loyal, commonplace ways in the context of the Conservative party; the LEL was an imperial pressure group whose public activities consisted of heated and disruptive events designed to draw attention to its out-dated view of the Empire. The JIL and the LEL, therefore, form the bulk of the thesis because they delimit the range of imperial activist groups and yet have remained unexplored by historians. If we are able to understand more fully the nature of these two extremes of imperial activism, a better insight into imperial activism in general is made possible.

Chapter 1. Loyal to the Empire: a survey of some twentieth century British imperial activist groups

The main content of this thesis focuses on the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists, two organisations neglected by historians but which throw important light on the nature of imperial activism in the twentieth century. An examination of them in isolation, however, would fail to locate them in the overall context of imperial activism. Such context is the subject of this chapter: the description and analysis of twenty-seven imperial activists and thus the identification of their perceptions of empire, the aspects of empire that concerned them, and the nature of their membership, enable some general conclusions to be drawn about imperial activism. Thus the JIL and LEL, in the ensuing chapters, can be contextualised and compared with other imperial activist groups.

Although we are concerned in this chapter with twentieth-century imperial activist groups, the origins of British imperial activism lie in the second half of the nineteenth century and to understand more fully imperial activist groups in the twentieth century these origins need to be considered. Furthermore, some activist groups established in Victorian times, such as the Royal Colonial Institute and the Primrose League, survived throughout the twentieth century and are thus fully relevant to this thesis. In the period from 1868, when the Royal Colonial Institute was established, until the end of the Victorian era in 1901, nine imperial activist groups were founded in Britain. In the seventeen years from 1902, at the close of the Boer War, until the end of the First World War in 1918, a further ten emerged and in the twenty year inter-war period, six more came into existence. None was created during the Second World War and only two in the post-war period. A survey of these twenty-seven groups forms the substance of this chapter. A full list of the organisations with the dates that they were active (where known) is shown in Table 1.

One can see from this brief summary that the most intensive and fertile period for the creation of imperial activist groups was in the period 1902 to 1918 and that it followed the steady build-up of groups in the late Victorian era. The inter-war

years saw a decline in the rate of formation of new groups, and in the post-war years new groups were a rarity. Imperial activist groups were not generally long-lived institutions; only about a third of the groups listed in Table 1 survived for more than twenty years.

It is unsurprising, perhaps, that this pattern of growth and decline is correlated with that of the British Empire itself. At times of high imperial interest, millions of people were members of imperial activist groups; in 1910, the Primrose League, for example, claimed to have over two million members. After the Second World War, when fewer than ten groups were active, membership had greatly declined in a period in which Britain was losing its Empire. These individuals and their organisations, therefore, are very relevant to understanding attitudes to, and perceptions of, the British Empire in Britain.

Table 1. British imperial activist groups (listed chronologically by date of foundation)

Royal Colonial Institute	1868-present	(Renamed Royal Empire Society in 1928 and Royal Commonwealth Society in 1957.)
Primrose League	1883-2004	
Imperial Federation League	1884-1893	
United Empire Trade League	1891-	
Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee	1894-1906	
Imperial South African Association	1896-1910	
British Empire League	1895-1955	(Merged with Empire Industries Association in 1947.)
Victoria League	1901-present	
League of the Empire	1901-present	
Empire Day Movement	1903-1963	
Tariff Reform League	1903-early 1920s	
Imperial Cooperation League	1906-1914	(Formerly Imperial Federation Defence Committee.)
Junior Imperial League	1906-1946	
Round Table Group	1909-1981	
Overseas Club	1910-1922	(Amalgamated with Patriotic League in 1922.)
Empire Parliamentary Association	1911-present	
Patriotic League of Britons Overseas	1914-1922	(Amalgamated with Overseas Club in 1922)
Empire Resources Development Committee	c.1916-c.1920	
British Empire Union	1915-c.1960s	
Women's Guild of Empire	1920s-1930s	
Empire Industries Association	1923-1976	
Empire Crusade	1929-late 1930s	(Included the United Empire Party.)
Indian Empire Society	1930-1940s	
India Defence League	1933-late 1930s	
British Federal Union	1938-?	
League of Empire Loyalists	1954-1967	
Expanding Commonwealth Group	c.1950s.	

Historians have mostly written about individual imperial groups and not, therefore, drawn general conclusions. In discussing their work and, at the same time, adding information obtained from primary sources (principally drawn from periodicals such as *United Empire* and *Round Table*, for example) it is useful to consider imperial activist groups in chronological order by date of foundation (see Table 1). This approach to examining imperial groups illustrates and clarifies the changing nature of imperial activism throughout the period under discussion. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the emphasis was on finding closer unity of the governance of Britain and the settler colonies through federalism. The question was not simply what form this should take but how it should be attempted. Two mechanisms were identified: trade and defence. During the Edwardian period, after the manifest failure of federalism (discussed later in this chapter), many activists divided into separate campaigns in these two areas. Alongside this specialisation, however, groups such as the Victoria League and the Junior Imperial League sought principally to celebrate and support the Empire rather than reform it. In the inter-war years this trend continued. The idea of formalised, integrated imperial defence weakened and activists with specific imperial interests concentrated on trade and Indian self-government. After the Second World War, and with the issue of Indian independence resolved in 1947, there remained as major activist issues only imperial trade (as an alternative to the European Economic Community) and (very limited) opposition to colonial independence. In summary then, the chronology can be divided into four, named, periods: the mid-late Victorian, which, as far as the sustained emergence of imperial groups is concerned, is from 1868 to 1900; the Edwardian (1901-1918); the inter-war years (1919-1939); and the Second World War and post-war decolonisation (1939-c.1967).

In the Victorian period there were three major groups that exhibited substantial interest in the British Empire: the Royal Colonial Institute; the Imperial Federation League (from which three other groups emerged in the 1890s); and the Primrose League. For the former two organisations the Empire was their *raison d'être*; for the latter the British Empire was not its sole purpose but was closely linked to its objectives and activities. All three provide valuable evidence about the people who were actively interested in the Empire.

The Royal Colonial Institute was founded in 1868 by a group, led by the Liberal Member of Parliament, Viscount Bury, who felt the need for gentlemen to have a 'colonial association' in London. Reese has described its wholly male membership as mainly aristocratic, upper class and drawn from the armed services, professions, clergy, and landed gentry.¹ John Mackenzie places a different emphasis, describing it as 'middle class and elitist' at least until 1914.² Women were admitted in 1909 as part of a more general campaign that eventually brought membership to 10,915 by 1915 when 'the tide of Imperial patriotism [was] running so strongly'³. Total membership in 1918 was 13,700, a substantial growth rate from only 3,775 in 1892 and 4,527 in 1909⁴. This growth came at the end of a period between 1890 and 1909 that had seen 'signs of decay' and passivity in the activities of the Institute.⁵ The Institute's activities were strictly non-political and non-commercial and its objects had an academic aura: the reading of papers; a library and reading room; discussions 'upon Colonial and Indian subjects...and scientific, literary, and statistical investigations in connection with the British Empire'.⁶ One may conclude from this brief summary that the Institute, in the Edwardian period, can be characterised as an elite, medium-sized imperial interest group with social and academic preferences.

The Primrose League was very different. For example, whereas the Royal Colonial Institute was criticised in 1909 for being slow to establish branches outside London, the League, founded in 1884, had formed 2645 branches (or habitations) by 1910 with a total membership, it claimed, of over two million people.⁷ Nor could it be described as elitist, in the sense that it was predominantly aristocratic or upper class because soon after it was founded, the League introduced Associate membership. Associates were working- and lower-middle class; in the organisational hierarchy they sat beneath the upper and middle class members, called Knights and

¹ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, p. 96.

² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 148.

³ *United Empire*, 6 (March 1915).

⁴ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, p. 97, p. 104, p. 134.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 259.

⁷ Janet Henderson Robb, *The Primrose League 1883-1906* (New York, 1942), p. 228. The League did not subtract membership losses from its figures but admitted to annual losses of about 6% each year (Robb, *The Primrose League*, p. 59).

Dames, and by 1886 made up 90% of the League's membership.⁸ It is clear, therefore, as Robb has observed, that 'imperialism was by no means a purely upper class movement'.⁹ Although the Primrose League's formally stated object was 'the promotion of Tory principles--viz. the maintenance of religion, of the estates of the realm, and of the "Imperial Ascendancy of Great Britain"',¹⁰ it stood apart from the Unionist party (in a similar way to the Junior Imperial League, as we shall see in Chapter 4). All members had to declare formally that they accepted these principles. Its sense of independence from the Conservative Party did not prevent it from campaigning on its behalf at elections and, in its earlier years, it was a vehicle for its unenfranchised women members to express actively their interest in politics.¹¹ The League offered its members a mixture of social activities, such as garden parties and lantern slide lectures, and politics; the latter is exemplified by its instruction in 1886 that members should whole-heartedly support parliamentary candidates who sought the unity of the Empire.¹² The year is significant because the question of Home Rule for Ireland galvanised the League and came at the beginning of six years of rapid growth in membership. The 'Irish issue [also] awakened an interest in the Empire as a whole'.¹³ The League, however, tempered its politics: although they formed part of local activities, 'detailed policies were simply regarded as out of bounds'.¹⁴ The League, nevertheless, was social *and* political. It was an effective populariser of imperial sentiment across all classes in a way that made it more an imperial interest group than a pressure group, and was echoed by the Junior Imperial League in the inter-war years, a time when the Primrose League had entered decline.

The Imperial Federation League was a strongly political imperial pressure group with a highly specialised imperial purpose but, unlike the RCI and the Primrose League, it was short-lived: founded in 1884, it disbanded less than ten years later. Although led initially by a Liberal MP, W.E. Forster, it was predominantly Conservative and supported by aristocrats and members of the political elite such as W.H. Smith MP, Sir Henry Holland MP and Lord Rosebery, it

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 148.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁰ Quoted in Robb, *The Primrose League*, p. 38.

¹¹ Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London, 1987), pp. 5-33.

¹² Robb, *The Primrose League*, p. 70.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford, 1985), p. 17.

did not engage effectively with working-class people¹⁵ but it sought, by drawing on 'the support of men of all political parties', 'to secure by Federation the permanent unity of the Empire'.¹⁶ Seventy MPs sat on its general committee in 1886. Although it did not explicitly explain what it meant by 'Empire', it is clear that this was not simply the 'white' Dominions; branches were set up Singapore, Hong Kong, Barbados and Gibraltar as well as in Cape Town, Montreal, Christchurch, Melbourne and elsewhere.¹⁷ To bring about this integrated governance of the Empire, the League campaigned for regular imperial conferences ('a Council of the Empire'); the integration of imperial foreign policy and the common defence of the Empire; and the introduction of an imperial tariff. Its policies were, however, incoherent¹⁸ and it was content that, in the words of Lord Carnarvon, speaking at a meeting of the City branch of the IFL in November 1889, it 'had always acted wisely in formulating no form of scheme [for Imperial federation]'.¹⁹ Since 1887 the League had been unable to reach an internal consensus 'over the question whether federation should be a matter primarily of trade or defence'.²⁰ Nevertheless, a report attempting to deal with these questions was laid before Gladstone in 1893. He rejected it. This was a second prime ministerial rebuff; Salisbury had argued in 1891 that a conference of the self-governing colonies, proposed by the League, would be inappropriate without a clear purpose and this dual failure caused an existential review. In November 1893 a meeting of members voted to bring the operations of the central Council of the League to a close.²¹ Some, however, did not see it as the end of their involvement in organised imperial activism; federation may have been elusive, but trade and defence remained practical issues of imperial importance.

Two organisations emerged directly from the demise of the IFL: the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee in 1894 and the British Empire League a year later.

¹⁵ M. D. Burgess, *The Imperial Federation Movement in Britain, 1869-1893*, PhD thesis, University of Leicester (1976), pp. 143-144, quoted in Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 2007), p. 43.

¹⁶ *United Empire*, 6 (April 1915), 263.

¹⁷ *The Times*, 16 February 1886, The Times Digital Archive 1785-1985 at <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.londonlibrary.co.uk>. (hereafter *The Times*).

¹⁸ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp. 268-269.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 16 November 1889.

²⁰ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth*, p. 70.

²¹ *United Empire*, 6 (April 1915), 273.

The Committee was ‘a rather small’ organisation²² whose ‘ultimate object’ was ‘the permanent unity of the British Empire by means of Federation’.²³ It sought to pursue this by distributing pamphlets and lobbying government ministers on matters of imperial defence: naval; and subsequently, at the beginning of the South African war in 1900, military. It eschewed any interest in fiscal policy; it believed that the federation of defence was sufficient to lead to unification of the Empire, by which it meant the self-governing colonies. By 1904, the Committee believed that it was ‘a fair way to attain[ing]’ its purpose and that ‘the need for pressure no longer existed’. In 1908, largely through the initiative of its Honorary Secretary, Howard d’Egville, it therefore ‘thought fit...to change its name to the Imperial Cooperation League and somewhat to alter its scope and activities’.²⁴ This decision can be understood in the context of the incoherent diversity of ideas about how imperial federalism was to be achieved and how various groups of imperial activists sought to organise themselves. As Duncan Bell has observed, ‘[m]ost contemporaries viewed the movement for imperial federation as a failure...and it...divided among competing interest groups’.²⁵ Indeed some individuals associated with the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee even took the view that a formal organisation was undesirable. Thus Frederick Pollock, seeking in 1904 to revive the work of the Imperial Federation League along ‘more practical lines’, argued that neither the Committee, nor the British Empire League, nor the Royal Colonial Institute were capable of doing so. It was more effective, he argued, not to create a formal organisation at all with ‘rules or even a name’.²⁶ His informal group pursued the idea of a consultative Imperial Council of representatives of the self-governing colonies supported by a permanent secretariat. It promulgated these ideas in a number of letters to *The Times* and included among its members the Duke of Devonshire, the Duke of Rutland, the Earl of Lytton, Lord Milner, Lord Avebury, Sir Charles Trevelyan, A.V. Dicey and Gilbert Parker, chairman of the Imperial South Africa Association. Thus the group can be described as an informal gathering of influential aristocratic and upper-class

²² Frederick Pollock, ‘Imperial Organisation’, *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation* (New Series) 6 (1905), 238.

²³ Anon., *Address to Her Majesty’s Ministers* (Imperial Federation (Defence) League pamphlet, August 1895)

²⁴ *United Empire*, 6 (May 1915), 246.

²⁵ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 15.

²⁶ Pollock, ‘Imperial Organisation’, 238.

men desirous of the greater constitutional cohesion of Britain and the self-governing colonies.

Avebury and the Duke of Devonshire were also leading figures in the creation of the British Empire League in 1894 out of the City of London branch of the defunct Imperial Federation League and it continued to exist until it merged with the Empire Industries Association in 1947. Its purpose was to seek imperial unity in a 'less ambitious' way than the Imperial Federation League.²⁷ This meant that it was more interested in promoting imperial trade (throughout the Empire, not simply the self-governing colonies), and in co-ordinating defence, than in constitutional issues. It sought to inform and educate the public mind and it was open to 'the support of men of all shades of political opinion throughout the Empire'.²⁸ The early leadership of the League was aristocratic, strongly political, entirely male and remained so into the 1930s. In 1936 under the presidency of the Duke of Devonshire and chairmanship of the Earl of Stradbroke, the League's vice-presidents included dukes, earls, marquesses, maharajahs and leading commoners such as Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Austen Chamberlain, Jan Smuts and L.S. Amery. The council and executive committee were largely made up of knights and military men alongside agents-general and high commissioners of the settler colonies. This elite membership, with its royal patronage, used prominent national venues to signify its status: its first official meeting was held at the Mansion House and presided over by the Lord Mayor; and the inaugural banquet for its social arm, the British Empire Club in St. James's Square, was held at the Guildhall in July 1909.

The United Empire Trade League (UETL) drew its membership from those in the Imperial Federation League who believed in imperial preference leading to 'commercial union within the empire'.²⁹ Founded in February 1891, before the demise of the Imperial Federation League, it is further evidence of how divided were those who campaigned for some form of imperial federation. The two principal founders of the UETL were Tory MPs. James Lowther, a cousin of the fifth earl of Lonsdale and 'a rare survival of old toryism' was chairman; and Howard Vincent,

²⁷ *United Empire*, 6 (June 1915), 433.

²⁸ LSE Archives ref. FHF/7. Anon., *The British Empire League* pamphlet (January 1936).

²⁹ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, p. 70.

later in 1895, chairman of the National Union of Conservative Associations, was honorary secretary. There was a strong political flavour to the League and its leadership was upper class though it seems not to have had the same degree of aristocratic support as the British Empire League. The United Empire Trade League argued for a policy of imperial autarky and that by achieving it, it would 'have gone a long way towards federation', according to Sir Thomas M'Ilwaith, Chief Secretary of Queensland.³⁰ Sir Thomas was one of about 300 members, of the total membership of over 5000, who served in the legislatures of various parts of the Empire, according to Lowther, speaking at the League's annual meeting in 1892.

The Imperial South African Association (ISAA) was founded in 1896 at, according to George Wyndham, his house in London 'by five gentlemen'³¹, one of whom was Dr Jameson. It was firmly placed 'in the first days of Lord Milner's labour in South Africa as High Commissioner', its President, the Duke of Westminster, explained at the Association's annual general meeting in 1908.³² 'Everyone present', the Duke declared to cheers, '[is] a faithful supporter of [Milner's] work in South Africa'. These references to Milner capture the fundamental ethos of the association. As Andrew Thompson succinctly observes, 'the ISAA was Milner's organisation' whose 'leading figures... revered [him]'.³³ Those leaders included Lord Windsor (later the earl of Plymouth and a founder member of the Junior Imperial League), the duke of Marlborough, Lord Lovat, Lord Winterton MP and several other MPs and knights. The Association was aristocratic, upper-class and political. Although it claimed to be 'non-party',³⁴ its General Council in the period 1895 to 1905, contained forty-six Conservative MPs, ten Liberal Unionists and only one Liberal MP. It was also active in campaigning against pro-Boer candidates in by-elections.³⁵

The ISAA's stated purpose was 'to maintain British supremacy, and promote good government in the various Colonies of South Africa, with the view to the

³⁰ *The Times*, 21 March 1894.

³¹ *The Times*, 22 May 1908.

³² *The Times*, 22 May 1908.

³³ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 61.

³⁴ Letter from Duke of Westminster, president, and Gilbert Parker, chairman, *The Times*, 29 December 1905.

³⁵ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 102.

establishment of a Dominion of South Africa under the British flag'.³⁶ This closely echoed the primary principle of the South Africa League, founded in the Cape Colony in the same year as the ISAA, that '[t]his League affirms most strongly its unalterable resolve to support the existing supremacy of Great Britain in South Africa'. Indeed, the *Manchester Guardian*, in an editorial in June 1900, described the ISAA as 'virtually the English branch of the South Africa League'.

It promulgated its policies by producing leaflets and pamphlets explaining to the British public what was happening in South Africa and thus seeking its support for their kith and kin in South Africa. Ten and a half million were distributed between 1896 and 1908 and during the same period, the ISAA held 2,200 meetings, in the local branches of political parties and in working men's clubs throughout the country, attended by over a million people.³⁷ This self-proclaimed level of activity contradicts Thompson's description of the ISAA as an inconspicuous pressure group, even if it did not have a large membership.³⁸ Whatever its size or popularity may have been, the distribution of large amounts of information, through either the written or spoken word, did not necessarily mean that it was effective propaganda. However, the Association, at least in its own estimation, believed that its principal imperial objective had been achieved. Thus in June 1910, at its last annual general meeting, a resolution was passed 'winding up the Association in view of the accomplishment of the aims for which it had laboured culminating in the unification of South Africa'.³⁹

The Victoria League, like the ISAA, had origins in an imperialist response to the situation in South Africa at the turn of the century but it was very different from it in several respects. Not least, after initially concentrating on the social consequences in South Africa of the Boer war, it was interested in all the self-governing colonies, not just South Africa. Its activities were mainly about social welfare, hospitality and education, not the federal governance matters in South Africa that monopolised the ISAA's activities. In addition, it was, notwithstanding

³⁶ Letter from Duke of Westminster, president, and Gilbert Parker, chairman, *The Times*, 29 December 1905.

³⁷ Speech by George Wyndham reported in *The Times*, 22 May 1908; letter from Duke of Westminster, president, and Gilbert Parker, chairman to *The Times*, 29 December 1905.

³⁸ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 64.

³⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 June 1910.

the substantial presence of women in the Primrose League, the only imperial interest group in the Victorian and Edwardian period that was ‘predominantly female’.⁴⁰ It was founded in May 1901 by twenty-five women who ‘represented Britain’s social and political elite’ and its ‘first committee was composed solely of women’.⁴¹ Membership, however, was open equally to men and women, in contrast to the League’s associated organisations (also founded in 1901), the Daughters of the Empire, in Canada, and the Guild of Loyal Women, in South Africa. Membership grew from 148 at the outset, to 6,500 by 1915 but in spite of efforts to recruit working class members, the League was overwhelmingly upper and middle class.⁴²

The League claimed to be non-party in pursuing its purposes but, according to Riedi, whereas it avoided close association with the Tories,⁴³ it was political because it promoted ‘Milnerite imperialism’.⁴⁴ However, arguably it was not political in the same sense as the contemporaneous groups discussed in this chapter who actively campaigned for changes in imperial governance, trade or defence. The League did not assert itself politically in the way that these groups did. It was ‘social’ to an extent because it founded the Ladies’ Empire Club in London (with 1050 members in 1915)⁴⁵ but perhaps the word that describes its ethos best is ‘charitable’, at least during the Edwardian period, if not thereafter. Thus, it had an education committee, a hospitality committee to welcome overseas visitors to Britain, and raised funds to help families affected by the Boer war and for the maintenance of war graves in South Africa. Eliza Riedi captures the nature of these activities of the League by describing its imperialism as relying on the ‘organisation of sentiment’.⁴⁶ This sentiment, however, related almost entirely to ‘kith and kin’ because, like many other imperial groups, its main emphasis was on the self-governing colonies, not on the totality of the British Empire and, in particular, it found it difficult to include even a major component of the Empire, India, in its purview.

⁴⁰ Eliza Riedi, ‘Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire; the Victoria League, 1901-1914’, *The Historical Journal*, 45, 569-599 (p. 569, p. 575).

⁴¹ *United Empire*, 6 (August 1915), 589.

⁴² Riedi, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of the Empire’, p.577-8.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.572.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.579.

⁴⁵ *United Empire*, 6 (August 1915), 592.

⁴⁶ Riedi, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of the Empire’, p.597.

The League of the Empire, like the Victoria League, had female origins and governance. It was sufficiently complementary and similar to the Victoria League that it entered into negotiations, early in 1908, to merge the two organisations but these collapsed, with some acrimony, the following year because of irreconcilable differences over governance. The League was established in 1901 by Mrs Ord Marshall, the widow of a senior civil servant. She was the League's honorary secretary from its inception until her death in 1931 and its 'guiding spirit and indefatigable organiser... entirely' responsible for its success, according to her obituarist in *The Times*.⁴⁷ The purpose of the League arose from a belief that there was a strong link 'between educational reform and the survival of the British Empire'.⁴⁸ Thus the League aimed to develop, through educational relationships, an active interest in the Empire in young people especially in Britain and the Dominions. In doing so, the League became 'a private Society with a semi-official standing' according to Professor Albert Pollard.⁴⁹ By 1915 the League had, according to its president, Frederick Pollock (formerly of the IFL), 'flourishing branches throughout the Empire numbering in some cases a membership of many thousands'.⁵⁰ A major achievement was to initiate, in 1907, a series of conferences attended by representatives of educational departments from the Dominions and colonies. At the conference it was agreed to hold such meetings every four years and, accordingly, a conference in 1911 was convened by the British government. After the First World War, when the League fully resumed its activities, the emphasis moved from government education departments to teachers from various parts of the Empire and they met at conferences in 1921, 1924, 1926 and 1928. The League also arranged a scheme of reciprocal exchanges of teachers and supplied materials for illustrated lectures to 'a great number of schools'. Although the League planned to engage with elementary schools, it appears to have had a stronger relationship with public schools in England including Winchester, Haileybury, Sherborne, Repton, Rugby and Tonbridge. This perhaps shows a bias towards an upper middle-class ethos, although some of its events were presided over by peers such as Lord Grey

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 30 March 1931.

⁴⁸ J. G. Greenlee, 'Imperial Studies and the Unity of Empire', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 7 (1979), 321-335 (p. 321).

⁴⁹ A.F. Pollard (ed.), *The British Empire* quoted in Frederick Pollock, 'The League of the Empire', *United Empire*, 6 (October 1915), 738.

⁵⁰ Frederick Pollock, 'The League of the Empire', *United Empire*, 6 (October 1915), 740.

and Lord Strathcona, and it included Meath, Curzon and Selborne among its vice-presidents thus providing it with aristocratic endorsement. There was, however, a popular aspect of the League of the Empire: it was closely involved in organising the celebration of Empire Day, an idea first mooted in 1894 by Thomas Robinson, a member of the Royal Colonial Institute living in Canada,⁵¹ which was subsequently pursued by Lord Meath and his Empire Day Movement which he founded, several years later, in 1903.⁵²

From its inception, until 1913, Meath ran the organisation without a committee because he believed that the organisation would work more efficiently under his single-handed direction.⁵³ Meath stood down from overall leadership in 1921 and it passed successively to various upper-class or aristocratic men including Sir Lawrence Wallace, Lt-Col. Sir William Wayland, Lord Jellicoe and Earl Beatty⁵⁴. Meath's main aim was to get official recognition of Empire Day in Britain 'by fixing one day of the year in which the attention of all men, women and children' could be focussed on 'the importance of acquiring a thorough knowledge of...the great Empire to which they belonged'⁵⁵ thus fostering 'a justifiable and heartfelt love of the Empire'.⁵⁶ Particular emphasis was laid on doing so in schools and colleges. The movement grew substantially: in 1905 '6000 schools throughout the Empire were said to have participated' in observing Empire Day and by 1922 this had 'grown to 80,000'⁵⁷. Although the annual celebration was extensive it is, however, less clear how many subscribing members there were in the Movement during this period. From 1922 until 1945 the Empire Day Movement was affiliated

⁵¹ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, p. 153. John Mackenzie is wrong to state that Lord Meath originated the movement for the celebration of Empire Day. Meath wrote to *The Times* in 1897, three years after Robinson's idea (not 1896, as Mackenzie states), aware that an imperial ceremony for children had been celebrated in Canada in 1896, suggesting a patriotic holiday for schools on the anniversary of Victoria's accession (June 20) not her birthday (May 24), as Mackenzie states (Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 231).

⁵² Howard Drake, in *The British Empire and What It Stands For*, a Royal Empire Society pamphlet published in 1939, incorrectly gives 1892 as the date of foundation.

⁵³ J. O. Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1970), 97-111 (p. 106).

⁵⁴ Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, p. 155-6.

⁵⁵ Speech by Lord Meath at the inaugural celebration of Empire day reported in *The Times*, 25 May 1904.

⁵⁶ Drake, *The British Empire and What It Stands For*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 232-233.

to the RCI and continued thereafter once again as an independent organisation until 1962.⁵⁸

The Tariff Reform League (TRL) was a highly political imperial pressure group which placed great emphasis on electoral activities as a means of campaigning for ending Britain's free trade policy and introducing tariffs on foreign imports in order to facilitate imperial preference. It claimed to be a non-party organisation but was closely associated with the Unionist party and caused divisions within it. According to Anne Summers the League was founded in July 1903 by Joseph Chamberlain⁵⁹ but W.E. Dowding's version of events disagrees with this. The TRL's origins, he has argued, lie in a meeting, on 14 May 1903 at the House of Commons, that founded the Protection League, subsequently renamed in the course of the next few weeks, first to the Imperial Tariff League, and then to the Tariff Reform League.⁶⁰ Motivated, coincidentally, by Chamberlain's Birmingham speech the following day in which he expressed ideas that matched those of the new organisation, members of the League contacted him. In September 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, who had been Colonial Secretary since 1895, resigned the post thus allowing him to campaign for the League as its protagonist. He argued for tariff reform as a 'basis for [imperial] preference, and he advocated preference for imperial union'.⁶¹ Sydney Zebel agrees with Sykes: a 'basic... concern [of Chamberlain was] with effecting closer imperial integration'.⁶² Specifically, according to the League's mandate, tariff reform would be used 'to consolidate and develop the resources of the Empire, and to defend the industries of the United Kingdom'.⁶³

The TRL's inaugural meeting, presided over by the Duke of Sutherland, took place on 21 July 1903 and was well attended. A few peers and twenty-nine MPs

⁵⁸ Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire', p. 106.

⁵⁹ Anne Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues', in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, ed. by Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London, 1981), pp. 70-87 (p. 71).

⁶⁰ W. E. Dowding, *The Tariff Reform Mirage* (London, 1913), p. 10.

⁶¹ Alan Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics* (Oxford, 1979), p. 43.

⁶² Sydney H. Zebel, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform', *Journal of British Studies*, 7 (1967), 131-157 (p. 157).

⁶³ Milner Papers, quoted in Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 40.

were present⁶⁴ and the social class of those attending appears to have been upper middle-class rather than aristocratic. The executive committee, exclusively male, had eleven MPs in its complement of twenty-one and only one peer, the Duke of Westminster. As Thompson has observed peers were often only figureheads⁶⁵ and the Duke exemplifies this. In 1907, it was announced that there were no fewer than 184 peers who were vice-presidents of the League, and given the plethora of vice-presidents, many of these may have been simply figureheads.⁶⁶

The TRL had created 250 branches by 1905, 600 by 1910 and 800 by 1913.⁶⁷ Assuming that branches had on average several hundred members⁶⁸ (and that branches remained extant) this would suggest a total membership in excess of 200,000 by 1913. A women's section was formed and the League was eager to recruit working-class members. It found this difficult; its trade union section, TUTRA, had 'pretty well 10,000 members' by November 1909⁶⁹ but Summers states that in 1910 TUTRA had only '31 branches and 1,000 members'.⁷⁰ Even the higher figure is a very small proportion of the TRL's membership and miniscule when set against total trade union membership of 2,477,000 in 1910.⁷¹ Perhaps Lord Hardinge was right when he told a TRL meeting in 1905 that 'the only way to get hold of the working man was to hold entertainments in public-houses'.⁷²

In its early years the TRL was strong financially; the secretary, T. W. A. Bagley, 'estimated that nearly £160,000 had been received in subscriptions and

⁶⁴ The names of those present listed in *The Times* dated 22 July 1903 do not include Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain's resignation as Colonial Secretary was announced on 17 September 1903 leaving him completely free to pursue tariff reform with particular emphasis on imperial preference (correspondence between Chamberlain and Balfour published in *The Times*, 18 September 1903).

⁶⁵ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 127.

⁶⁶ Dowding, *The Tariff Reform Mirage*, p. 23. This was out of a total of 2,942 (sic) vice-presidents (345 of whom were MPs or prospective parliamentary candidates according to the League's chairman, Lord Ridley). Such a large number of VPs might suggest that figureheads were being 'collected'. This was a policy, but on a much smaller scale, of the League of Empire Loyalists fifty years later (see Chapter 5).

⁶⁷ Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism', p. 71 and Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 47.

⁶⁸ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 47.

⁶⁹ L. S. Amery, quoted in Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics*, p. 222.

⁷⁰ Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism', p. 71.

⁷¹ David Butler and Anne Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, 5th edn (London and Basingstoke, 1980), p. 340.

⁷² TRL Monthly Notes August 1905, quoted in Dowding, *The Tariff Reform Mirage*, p. 23.

donations over the period 1903-10⁷³ but income declined sharply from 1911. In October 1922, a statement announcing the closure of the TRL, whilst claiming that the principles of the TRL had received ‘definite expression’ in recent government budgets and legislation, stated that there was a lack of funds to continue the work of campaigning for a broader policy of imperial trade and consolidation. Fortunately, a recently formed organisation, the Empire Development Union, was better able to take forward the issues, the statement said, and TRL members were urged to give it their support.⁷⁴

Within the chronological survey of imperial activist groups that forms the structure of this chapter, the next group is the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, the beginnings of which occurred in 1905 when the debate about tariff reform was in full spate. Those who assembled to decide the purpose of the League drew inspiration from Joseph Chamberlain, as will be seen in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the League in detail and place it within the context and characteristics of imperial interest groups in general. Detailed comment on the League is therefore deferred until then but the League will be set in the general context of imperial interest groups towards the end of this chapter.

The Round Table and its eponymous quarterly publication were created by a closely-knit group of about fifteen young men, collectively known as ‘the Kindergarten’, all alumni of public schools and Oxford, who worked with Lord Milner in South Africa and subsequently in London. The founders were exclusively peers and upper-middle class men. One member of the Kindergarten, Lionel Curtis, had played a significant role in bringing about the unification of South Africa by drafting the Selborne memorandum, a catalyst for the unification of South Africa in 1910. Curtis had already expressed the view, three years earlier to Lord Selborne, that the unification of South Africa could be seen as a microcosm of the unification

⁷³ Thompson, ‘Thinking Imperially?’, p. 81. Franz Coetzee has argued that ‘the sums available were considerably smaller than is commonly assumed’ and that ‘huge funds donated by millionaires [were] a myth’ (F. Coetzee, ‘Pressure Groups, Tory Businessmen and the Aura of Political Corruption Before the First World War’, *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986), 833-852 (pp. 846-850)). A relative assessment of the League’s income can be made by comparing it with the annual central income of the Conservative party in 1912 which was £80,000 (Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, p. 133).

⁷⁴ Letter in *The Times*, 12 October 1922. The Empire Development Union is described later in this chapter.

of the self-governing Dominions. Supported by Milner, Curtis was able to arrange the meeting in September 1909 that inaugurated the Round Table movement for imperial unity and appointed him its general secretary. It was attended by several members of the Kindergarten and by a number of peers: Milner, Lovat, Howick and Wolmer. Although soon augmented by others such as Leo Amery, Edward Grigg, John Buchan, Arthur Steel-Maitland and Waldorf Astor,⁷⁵ the ‘core of the group remained, until the Second World War, the Kindergarten’.⁷⁶

This long period of continuity of the founders’ involvement is perhaps the reason for what May has called their tenacity ‘in clinging to the idea of Imperial or Commonwealth unity’.⁷⁷ What this meant was never clearly defined. Hodson, who edited *The Round Table* from 1934, recalled in 1981 that the ‘master theme...was the imperative need for a central authority to conduct foreign policy and defence of the whole Empire in which the self-governing Dominions would play a full democratic part’. The founders, however, he believed, ‘were never corporately committed to it in any precise way’ and would rather develop their ideas privately at their meetings (which they referred to as the Moot) than discuss them publicly.⁷⁸ Consistent with this was their plan to publish a quarterly journal which would have a ‘small elite circulation among influential people’ whilst not ‘advocating any definite plan of imperial union’.⁷⁹ It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasise the reticent elitism of the group. The young historian Lewis Namier gave a series of lectures about the Empire on behalf of the Round Table to trade unionists and the Workers’ Educational Association and his experience contains useful evidence about working-class awareness of the Empire. He was shocked at their ignorance which was, he said, ‘as complete concerning the white as the dark Empire’.⁸⁰

Round Table groups were founded in the Dominions in the years leading up to the First World War and they too had a membership drawn from ‘an elite

⁷⁵ Entry for Lionel Curtis in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* at www.oxforddnb.com (hereafter *ODNB*).

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ May, *The Round Table, 1910-66*, p. 449.

⁷⁸ Hodson, ‘The Round Table, 1910-1981’, p. 310.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 311, p. 314.

⁸⁰ Letter from Namier to Grigg, 14 July 1914, quoted in Deborah Lavin, ‘Lionel Curtis and the Idea of Commonwealth’, in *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth: Essays Presented to Sir Edgar Williams*, ed. by Frederick Madden and D. K. Fieldhouse (London, 1982), pp. 97-121 (p. 105).

minority' but they failed to achieve the longevity of the metropolitan group and by the 1930s had become largely inactive. The main group, however, persisted in the inter-war years in its 'remarkably optimistic'⁸¹ belief that imperial unity could be achieved. Alex May argues that it was not until the 1940s that the 'idea of Imperial unity in defence and foreign policy was ...rejected'.⁸² After the Second World War, and the passing of the last surviving founder member, Robert Brand, the group's publication, the *Round Table*, was reformed in 1966, becoming a more academic journal that no longer pursued any particular imperial policy and it continues to be published to the present day.

The Overseas Club, founded in 1910, and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, founded in 1914, were very similar organisations and illustrate the fragmentation and overlapping activities of imperial interest groups. Their merger in 1922, to form the Overseas League, was thus an appropriate outcome.⁸³

The Club was founded by Evelyn Wrench, a journalist working for Lord Northcliffe, whose imperial enthusiasm had been inspired by a visit to Canada in 1906 and a subsequent tour of the Empire. It was a resolutely non-political organisation that pledged, 'as citizens of the greatest Empire in the world, to maintain the heritage handed down to us by our fathers'. To do so, members were entreated to pursue the 'four chief objects of the Club...to help one another; to render individual service to our Empire; to maintain our Empire's supremacy upon the seas; to draw together in the bond of comradeship, British people the world over'.⁸⁴ The Club saw itself as having no class distinctions; it was 'one vast brotherhood of British subjects pledged to maintain our Empire'.⁸⁵ Its leadership, however, had a substantial aristocratic element. Northcliffe was its president and he and Lord Grey helped with the establishment of the Club. Vice-presidents included Selborne, Bryce and Meath, ubiquitous imperialists. Most notably the king, George V, was patron and this royal connection was steadfastly maintained so that by July 1931 the Prince of Wales had become its vice-patron and the duke of York its

⁸¹ May, *The Round Table, 1910-66*, p. 447.

⁸² May, 'The Round Table, 1910-66', Abstract, sixth page.

⁸³ This date is from Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society* (p. 148), but the entry for Evelyn Wrench in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* gives the date as 1918.

⁸⁴ *United Empire*, 6 (Sep. 1915), 650.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 651.

president. In 1959 the Club became the *Royal Overseas League* and still exists at the time of writing.

The Club operated at two levels. In its home and overseas branches, which were expected to meet at least monthly, banquets, concerts and patriotic demonstrations ‘on such occasions as Empire Day [and] the King’s birthday’ were held. At a more centralised level, funds were raised during the First World War to supply tobacco to servicemen and also provide military equipment. By September 1915 ‘fifteen aeroplanes [had been funded] and delivered to the Royal Flying Corps’.⁸⁶ It was this patriotic fund-raising activity that brought together the Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas (PLBO) to form the Overseas League. The PLBO, with Selborne as its chairman, aspired, as its main object, to ‘present an addition to the armed forces’ deciding that the ‘most suitable gift would be a war-ship’. Those who subscribed, it was hoped, would then form a permanent society that would be comparable to the German Navy League.⁸⁷

The extent of support for the Overseas Club is unclear because of confused terminology and geography. According to Evelyn Wrench, the membership of the Overseas Club in 1914 was only 800 but by 1931 this had grown to 45,000.⁸⁸ Reese states that there were 26,000 ‘subscribers’ in 1919 and 170,000 ‘supporters’, mainly in the Dominions.⁸⁹ Richard Jebb, in 1915, refers to 130,000 British subjects overseas as having ‘enrolled’.⁹⁰ Finally, an earlier report in *United Empire* speaks of 10,000 members in foreign countries’,⁹¹ i.e. not part of the British Empire. One may perhaps conclude from these figures that the (subscribing) membership in Britain increased from a few hundred in 1914 to two or three tens of thousands by the 1930s. Furthermore, the interest and membership of the League was mainly, as Mackenzie has written,⁹² in the Dominions where there were hundreds of branches.

⁸⁶ *United Empire*, 6 (Sep. 1915), 654.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 6 (Jan. 1915), 19-20.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 3 July 1931.

⁸⁹ Reese, *The History of the Commonwealth Society*, p. 149.

⁹⁰ *United Empire*, 6 (Sep. 1915), 654.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 6 (Jan. 1915), 19.

⁹² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 158.

The Empire Parliamentary Association (EPA), founded in 1911, was the result of an initiative by members of the Imperial Cooperation League (ICL) led by its Honorary Secretary, Howard d'Egville, a young barrister, who became, for almost fifty years, the dominant force in the EPA.⁹³ Inspired by the opportunity to invite members of parliament from the Dominions to the coronation of George V, a committee of members of the ICL, who were also MPs at Westminster, identified strong parliamentary support for the establishment of the association. Accordingly it was resolved, in June 1911, to establish 'an association ... having branches in the United Kingdom parliament and the Parliaments of the overseas Dominions, so that mutual intercourse and exchange of information should be facilitated'. The following month, at a conference attended by members of the parliaments of the UK and Dominions, it was resolved to create a 'permanent [administrative] machinery'.⁹⁴ In the London branch, which was responsible for the overall management of the Association, the Lord Chancellor and Speaker were joint Presidents with Lord Grey as Chairman and d'Egville as Honorary Secretary. Membership was confined to individuals in the legislatures of Britain and the five Dominions; the rest of the Empire was deliberately excluded.⁹⁵ It allowed members from the Dominions to enjoy parliamentary privileges; to attend Speaker's levees; to gain entry to London clubs such as the Reform and Carlton; and to enjoy hospitality at lunches, teas and dinners when visiting London.⁹⁶ There were reciprocal arrangements for members visiting the Dominions.

The EPA was not, however, simply a social organisation; it had close ties with the UK government and received an annual grant from the Exchequer from 1916. It saw itself as having an important role in maintaining political links within the Empire particularly as the governance of Dominions became increasingly independent of Britain in the inter-war period. Howard d'Egville remained the driving force of EPA during the inter-war years and was instrumental in eventually introducing membership to colonies with their own representative government, such as Malta, Southern Rhodesia, India and Ceylon, so that by 1939 there were twenty

⁹³ Ian Grey, *The Parliamentarians: the History of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 1911-1985* (Aldershot, 1986), p. 2.

⁹⁴ Grey, *The Parliamentarians*, p. 4.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁶ *United Empire*, 6 (November 1915), 19.

branches whose representatives attended regular conferences that provided a forum for them to express political ideas. He remained Honorary Secretary until 1960 and the organisation he established still exists at the time of writing, now called the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Howard d'Egville was also an important figure in the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) and worked 'unstintingly' for it.⁹⁷ The initiator, however, of the ERDC was Moreton Frewen, a Unionist MP and imperial federalist, who had been Joseph Chamberlain's 'most vivid apostle in the cause of tariff reform'.⁹⁸ He organised a meeting of nineteen of his friends in October 1916, presided over by Milner, to which were invited a number of peers, MPs, and others, such as Lord Plymouth, Lord Selborne, Page Croft and Alfred Bigland, also a Unionist MP and tariff reformer, who later chaired the (unofficial) British Empire Development Parliamentary Committee which emerged from the ERDC, in July 1920, to reinforce its work.⁹⁹ The principal object of the ERDC was to conserve and develop the natural resources of the Empire in order to 'give the [British] State an adequate share of the proceeds'.¹⁰⁰ These proceeds were to be used to help reduce the British War Debt. Although, in principle, the interests of the ERDC ranged over the entire Empire, it concentrated its attention on Canada, Southern Africa and West Africa. Its proposals, however, 'were nearly always vague' and were frequently criticised as unworkable.¹⁰¹

The Parliamentary Committee claimed a membership of 216 MPs and therefore, according to Bigland, was 'able to create an atmosphere in the House on all Empire questions which gave confidence to the Government'.¹⁰² It worked on proposals in a number of imperial economic areas and made proposals to Government ministers but little came of them. As Bigland observed in 1926: 'the

⁹⁷ Alfred Bigland, *The Call of Empire* (London, 1926), p. 97.

⁹⁸ *The Times*, 4 September 1924.

⁹⁹ Bigland, *The Call of Empire*, p. 89 and p. 96. D. Killingray, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee and West Africa, 1916-20', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 10 (1982), 194-210 (p. 199).

¹⁰⁰ *The Observer*, 28 January 1917.

¹⁰¹ Killingray, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee and West Africa', pp. 197-198.

¹⁰² Bigland, *The Call of the Empire*, p. 99. However, in an appendix to *The Call of Empire*, Bigland lists only 191 names of members.

numerous discussions which took place during the three years our Committee was at work did not show any great results...'.¹⁰³

The British Commonwealth Union (BCU) was initially dedicated to tariff reform. It was established in December 1916 and, like the ERDC, had a specific policy of attempting to gain, in pursuit of its objectives, the sustained support of imperially-minded MPs. It had the 'avowed purpose of promoting "a powerful Industrial Party in the House of Commons"'¹⁰⁴ and exemplifies what Andrew Marrison has described as the increasing involvement of businessmen in parliament in a general way rather than in a manner that addressed a particular industrial sector, such as coal-mining or the railways. The BCU sought 'a monopoly of business-government communication'.¹⁰⁵ Its founder members were eight senior businessmen, acting as private individuals and not as representatives of their companies, and the Conservative MP for Hammersmith, Sir William Bull, who were dissatisfied with the non-political policy of the Federation of British Industry. Initially the group called themselves the London Imperialists, confining their campaign to London parliamentary constituencies, and sought, but failed to gain, the cooperation of the FBI because the latter did not wish to be seen '[tak]ing direct Parliamentary action in its corporate capacity'.¹⁰⁶ However, by June 1917, even though the interests of the group widened beyond London, membership was still only about twenty mainly comprising men who were also members of the FBI. The group decided to call itself the Industrial and Agricultural Legislative Union and a constitution was agreed:

To endeavour, by Parliamentary action, to safeguard and promote the agricultural and industrial interests and adequate defences of the British Empire... To promote and develop the natural and commercial resources of the Empire, and the close association among all British Dominions and Dependencies... To encourage by all possible means the trade of the Empire.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁴ The Hannon Papers at the House of Lords Record Office [hereafter HLRO], quoted by J. A. Turner, 'The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918', *English Historical Review*, 93 (1978), 528-559 (p. 529). The information in this chapter about the BCU is largely taken from Turner.

¹⁰⁵ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 325.

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the London Imperialists, 14 June 1917, quoted in Turner, 'The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918', p. 534.

Having failed to gain the support of the FBI, the BCU sought closer ties with other organisations including, for example, the Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), the Shipbuilding Federation and the British Workers' National League (who were also active in supporting the ERDC).¹⁰⁷ Financial support was received from Dudley Docker, a Birmingham industrialist and tariff reformer who founded the Federation of British Industries in 1916. In June 1918, by now calling itself the British Commonwealth Union, the organisation created a complete governance structure and Patrick Hannon¹⁰⁸ was appointed its general secretary. The Union now addressed its main purpose: to secure the election of a group of MPs that would argue for tariff reform. Andrew Marrison, however, has shown that the new structure, with its influx of fresh leadership, led to an 'equivocal, ambivalent and essentially limited approach to Tariff Reform'.¹⁰⁹

The BCU participated in the general election in December 1918 by selecting and financing parliamentary candidates, recruiting political organisers and employing paid speakers to support them. According to Turner, the BCU claimed to support twenty-four candidates¹¹⁰ of which eighteen were elected but, he states, 'it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the BCU'.¹¹¹ Whether or not the BCU was effective, there was, according to its own evaluation, a significant minority of MPs supporting its policies. Hannon declared in May 1919 that 'there is today an Industrial Group...comprising in its definite membership one tenth of the House'.¹¹² Nevertheless, the BCU did not prevail for long as an independent body; by 1926 the

¹⁰⁷ Killingray, 'The Empire Resources Development Committee and West Africa', p. 200. The British Workers' National League was created by Lord Milner. A description of its origins and activities is given in J. O. Stubbs, 'Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour', *English Historical Review*, 87 (October 1972), 717-754.

¹⁰⁸ Hannon was a prominent figure in the Tariff Reform League and was editor of *Navy*, the journal of the Navy League, from 1911 to 1918. He was also instrumental, he claimed, in founding the Coningsby Club in 1921, a dining club for young Tory men who had attended Oxford or Cambridge, 'to promote the Imperial policy of Disraeli' (letter from Hannon to *The Sunday Times*, 29 June 1958).

¹⁰⁹ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 331.

¹¹⁰ Of these twenty-four, twelve were also members of the ERDC (derived from comparing appendices in Turner, 'The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918' and Bigland, *The Call of the Empire*).

¹¹¹ Turner, 'The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918', p. 543.

¹¹² Letter to *The Observer*, 4 May 1919. The Industrial Group was one of several Unionist party groups that were formed during and immediately after the First World War, which Philip Norton has referred to as 'attitude groups' created to pursue a particular issue in Parliament (Philip Norton, 'The Parliamentary Party and Party Committees', in *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. by Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (Oxford, 1994), pp. 97-144 (p. 103)).

BCU had been absorbed in the newly-formed Empire Industries Association.¹¹³ Its weakening support for Tariff Reform and imperial preference, its adoption of aggressive anti-labour policies and its narrow industrial focus had brought about a terminal decline in membership and subscriptions.¹¹⁴

The British Empire Union (BEU), founded in April 1915, survived much longer, until after the Second World War and long enough to change its name to the British Commonwealth Union (perhaps confusingly).¹¹⁵ Its original name was the Anti-German Union (with no connection to the Anti-German League) but in March 1916 it decided to call itself the British Empire Union in order to be ‘more expressive of its greatly enlarged aims and activity’. It had now become ‘national and imperial’¹¹⁶ and aimed to develop a ‘spirit of British nationalism based on a patriotism which recognised the ideals of this great Empire’.¹¹⁷ ‘The Union’, it declared, ‘has for its objects the Consolidation of the British Empire, the development of Trade and Commerce within the Empire and with our allies, and the elimination of German influence from our political, financial and social life’.

Despite this broadened remit, its early propaganda concentrated extensively and virulently on anti-German and anti-alien themes. Thus, for example, immediately after the Versailles settlement it described Germans, in its monthly publication, as ‘a nation of savages, thieves, liars, and murderers, unworthy of intercourse with civilised people’.¹¹⁸ In domestic politics, it called for ‘British work for British people’ and campaigned in support of the Aliens Bill that was essential, it believed, ‘for dealing with the alien from within’.¹¹⁹

The BEU was unrealistically ambitious in its membership targets, declaring that 100,000 would bring ‘influence’ and five million, ‘success’. By 1917 it had

¹¹³ Turner, ‘The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918’, p. 529. Marrison states that agreement to do so was reached in December 1924 (*British Business and Protection*, p. 362).

¹¹⁴ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 349.

¹¹⁵ Database of Archives of Non-Governmental Organisations (DANGO) incorrectly refers to the Papers of Sir Patrick Hannon as being relevant to this organisation. He was, in fact, Director of the other, earlier, BCU (1915-1926). See www.dango.bham.ac.uk (accessed on 24.8.2012).

¹¹⁶ *The British Empire Union*. Pamphlet at Imperial War Museum, ref. K52495 (undated but c. 1917).

¹¹⁷ *British Empire Union Monthly Record*, 3 (February 1919).

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 3 (July 1919), 97.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 3 (October 1919), 143.

thirty-seven branches, predominantly in London and the south-east, but also in Belfast, Edinburgh, Manchester and Harrogate. A few branches occasionally reported membership numbers in the *Monthly Record* and, although growth in numbers was sometimes rapid, they suggest that typical branch membership was in the hundreds. It seems unlikely, therefore, that in 1919 the total membership of the BEU was more than about 20,000.¹²⁰ The Union was, however, ‘throughout its existence...supported by a...number of corporate members’¹²¹ (twenty-seven are listed in a display advertisement in *The Times*¹²² and ‘at least fifty’ in annual reports) but Arthur McIvor misleadingly describes the Union as an employers’ organisation.¹²³

Although there is some evidence that the Union had working-class members¹²⁴, it was, like many imperial interest groups, led by an elite. The prime ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Newfoundland were patrons and Lord Leith of Fyvie, a politically obscure, landed, Scottish peer with connections to the Navy League, TRL and the Empire Day Movement, was the president. The forty vice-presidents included four Conservative and Unionist MPs but most were peers or senior army officers. The thirteen-strong executive committee, however, was without rank or title with the exception of Lady Leith, Sir John Harrington and, as its chairman, Lt-Col. Sir Mervyn Manningham-Buller, a grandson of the Earl of Leicester.¹²⁵ The elitist content of the Union continued during the inter-war years and was perhaps even grander: the Duke of Grafton, Lord Carson, the Earl of Mansfield, Earl Beatty and Lord Lloyd all served as vice-presidents.¹²⁶

The specific objects of the BEU included imperial preference and the use of domestic fiscal policy to facilitate trade and commerce with the Dominions but

¹²⁰ Figures are taken from *British Empire Union Monthly Record*: Farnham 299 (September 1917) and 650 (July 1919); Glasgow 300 (May 1919); Norwood 435 (April 1919). Belfast appears to be exceptional; its membership grew from 321 in 1917 to 3,282 in June 1919.

¹²¹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 157.

¹²² *The Times*, 24 June 1916.

¹²³ Arthur McIvor, ‘“A Crusade for Capitalism”: The Economic League, 1919-1939’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (October 1988), 631-655 (p. 633).

¹²⁴ The Hampstead branch reported that ‘Mr Munn, builder and electrician, has joined our Committee and brought all his men and their wives as very active members.’ *British Empire Union Monthly Record*, 2 (February 1918), iii.

¹²⁵ *The British Empire Union*. Pamphlet at Imperial War Museum, ref. K52495 (undated but c. 1917).

¹²⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 157.

despite this it does not appear initially to have vigorously pursued imperial issues. In April 1918, H.S.A. Foy, the acting honorary treasurer wrote that the British Empire Union did not really deserve its name.¹²⁷ Over time, however, anti-German rhetoric was replaced by imperial propaganda. Mackenzie has described the content of the latter in the inter-war years: for example, the importance of imperial trade; wider acceptance of Empire Day; the teaching of the history of the Empire in schools; and the encouragement of emigration to the Empire. Its belief in the importance to Britain of Commonwealth trade continued right up to the 1960s.¹²⁸

The BEU continued to be active after the Second World War and was conservative in its outlook. As the Empire continued its transformation into the Commonwealth, it campaigned against the change of name of Empire Day to Commonwealth Day¹²⁹ and yet such change was inevitable; the Union itself replaced 'Empire' in its name with 'Commonwealth' in 1960. The British Commonwealth Union was probably wound up in, or shortly after, 1967.¹³⁰ Thus ended the existence of one of the most long-lived and right-wing imperial interest groups, variously labelled by historians as 'extremist', 'ultra-nationalist' and 'a British radical right group'.¹³¹

John Mackenzie refers to women who formed activist groups in the early twentieth century in order to pursue 'class conciliation through an emphasis on patriotic and imperial concerns' and specifically to one such feminist group, the Women's Guild of Empire, which was founded, 'about the time of the First World War'.¹³² It grew to '40,000 members in more than thirty branches at its peak in 1925'.¹³³ Flora Drummond and Elsie Bowerman, former suffragettes, initiated the

¹²⁷ *British Empire Union Monthly Record*, 2 (April 1918), 55.

¹²⁸ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 157.

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 24 May 1958.

¹³⁰ DANGO asserts that the records of the BEU have been lost but lists details of them taken from Chris Cook, *Sources in British Political History 1900-1951*, Vol. 1 (London, 1975), which show 1967 as the last recorded date of an AGM.

¹³¹ By, respectively: J. O. Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire'; David Cesarani, 'The Anti-Jewish Career of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Cabinet Minister', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (July 1989), 461-482 (p. 465); Stephen Cullen, 'Four Women for Mosley: Women in the British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940', *Oral History*, 24 (Spring 1996), 49-59 (p. 58).

¹³² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 159.

¹³³ *ODNB*, entry for Flora Drummond.

movement. It was pro-Conservative and anti-fascist¹³⁴ and is particularly of interest in the context of this chapter because it unambiguously shows that working-class people were interested in the Empire. Drummond and Bowerman were themselves working-class and their organisation sought to bring ‘a sense of patriotism to working-class women’.¹³⁵ The Guild’s imperialism was the medium through which it expressed its feminism. Although little is known of its activities, one campaign is recorded in which it fought to make uniform throughout the Empire, legislation defining the nationality of British women who married aliens, thus demonstrating what one historian has argued to be an example of ‘[a]ctivist women creat[ing] a collective identity and common cause grounded in their membership in the Empire’.¹³⁶ The Guild had, according to Mackenzie, ‘a general belief in the role of the Empire in British domestic affairs’.¹³⁷

The Empire Development Union (EDU) emerged in July 1922¹³⁸ but it was a short-lived organisation which was absorbed by the newly-established Empire Industries Association in 1925. The creators of the EDU were W.A.S. Hewins, acting chairman of the TRL when it was dissolved in October 1922, and Sir Vincent Caillard, president of the FBI in 1919 and of the Tariff Commission in 1920. Their initial idea of a merger with the BCU and TRL was unsuccessful. Marrison has suggested that the EDU’s policy on tariff reform was more slanted towards an imperial view rather than the BCU’s domestic emphasis of the issue.¹³⁹ Although Marrison does not say so, this difference may have been a contributory factor to the breakdown of merger talks. In any case, the failure caused them to form their own organisation, the EDU. Lord Long, a former Conservative MP and Secretary of State for the Colonies (1916-18), was appointed its president.

¹³⁴ Martin Durham, ‘Gender and the British Union of Fascists’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (July 1992), 513-529 (p. 521).

¹³⁵ *ODNB*, entry for Flora Drummond.

¹³⁶ M. Page Baldwin, ‘Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act’, *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (October 2001), 522-556 (p. 529 and p. 555).

¹³⁷ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 160.

¹³⁸ Although Marrison says that ‘[s]ignificantly, the EDU was formed in September 1922, during the death-throes of the Coalition’ (*British Business and Protection*, p. 358), it already existed in July 1922 (see *The Times*, 22 July 1922), before the Chanak crisis, in September and October, that led to the break-up of the Coalition.

¹³⁹ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 360.

The principal aim of the EDU was ‘the promotion of trade relations of the United Kingdom within the Empire’ and it was inspired by resolutions passed at the Imperial Conferences of 1917 and 1918 which the leaders of the EDU summarised in a statement made in July 1922:

‘the British Empire must approach the [economic] problem with a united mind...[including] the development of Empire resources by joint action, the organisation of supplies of raw materials, the safeguarding of essential industries...the development of Customs and administrative preferences within the Empire...’,¹⁴⁰

In common with almost all imperial activist groups, an early and vital task for the EDU was the raising of funds to finance its activities. To do so, the Union approached a number of titled individuals and leading, imperially-minded, businessmen for donations, offering them membership of a mooted Council. The response was poor and Marrison suggests that this was because ‘the accession of Labour destroyed any immediate prospect of extended [imperial] preference’.¹⁴¹ The ability of the EDU to promulgate its propaganda was thus severely hampered and it relied heavily on the Beaverbrook press. Its membership remained tiny and its meetings were attended only by its few founder members. Like the BCU, the EDU was absorbed by the Empire Industries Association (EIA).

The origins of the EIA are traced by Henry Page Croft to a meeting attended by Lord Milner, Leo Amery, Neville Chamberlain and their supporters, shortly after the defeat of the Conservative government at the general election of December 1923, a rejection by the electorate of Baldwin’s argument that tariffs should be introduced to protect the domestic market. Their intention was ‘to [form] an organisation for educating the country on the subjects of protection and imperial preference’¹⁴² and thus ‘maintain the momentum of Tariff Reform in the aftermath of Baldwin’s election defeat’.¹⁴³ There was little momentum initially, however. Although W.A.S. Hewins worked in the background compiling statistics for the use of industrialists

¹⁴⁰ *The Times*, 22 July 1922.

¹⁴¹ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 361. This cannot, however, be a complete explanation because the appeal for funds occurred in the second half of 1922 and a Labour government was not formed until January 1924.

¹⁴² Henry Page Croft, *My Life of Strife* (London, [1948]), p. 178.

¹⁴³ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 361.

sympathetic to the cause of tariff reform, there was little conspicuous progress until the appointment of a provisional executive committee in July 1925. The committee was chaired by Lord Hunsdon, a city businessman and chairman of the City of London Conservative Association. In deciding on its policies, two important issues were considered by the committee; the relative emphases to be placed on safeguarding of industry and imperial preference; and, more controversially, how to gain the support of socialists. To this latter end, four Labour politicians were appointed to the committee.¹⁴⁴

Several months of discussion in the committee failed to reconcile differences between the Tory and socialist views of what the Association should be trying to achieve and in April 1926 the Labour members withdrew. Marrison has summarised the situation: '[t]he Unionist members...insisted that the introduction of tariffs and preference must form the "principal plank" of EIA policy'. Even if the Labour members of the committee accepted this, however, they 'could not hope to gain any volume of support from the Labour party'.¹⁴⁵ Page Croft, a Conservative MP with an 'unflagging zeal for and faith in the British imperial heritage',¹⁴⁶ thought the whole process had been a waste of time and, with the socialists now gone, in July 1926 he agreed to become chairman of the Association on condition that there should be no further negotiations with the socialists and that he had 'a free hand to undertake propaganda at once on the widest possible scale'.¹⁴⁷ The appointment of a council followed in October.

The EIA lacked financial strength and its membership appears to have been narrowly based with only a small number of individuals and companies providing funding for its activities. We can, however, obtain some idea of the social nature of the Association from the membership of its council. The leadership of the EIA in the 1920s appears to have been predominantly upper middle-class; Marrison describes the EIA council as comprising 'landowners, statesmen, and imperialists among

¹⁴⁴ Dr Haden Guest, MP North Southwark; A. G. Church, MP Leyton East (1923-24); Frank Hodges, MP Lichfield (1923-24); and Robert Young, MP Newton, Lancs.

¹⁴⁵ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 368.

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 9 December 1947.

¹⁴⁷ Croft, *My Life of Strife*, p. 179.

whom lesser and provincial industrialists might feel uneasy'. It also included captains of industry, city magnates and retired naval and military officers.¹⁴⁸

Using his experience with the Tariff Reform League, Page Croft eschewed the setting up of an expensive network of branches. Instead he created a group of trained speakers and persuaded kindred organisations, such as Conservative Party Associations, the Junior Imperial League and the Primrose League, to allow them to speak at their meetings. Page Croft claims that they spoke at many hundreds of meetings a year, reaching the impressive number of almost 3,000 in the year leading up to the general election in October 1931.¹⁴⁹ The EIA's propaganda was also disseminated widely by its press and publicity department and by a weekly news service. In 1929, for example, the EIA issued four million pamphlets and also received 'extensive press coverage'.¹⁵⁰ In addition to its propaganda activities the EIA sought the support of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations by proposing policies at its annual conferences. Thus in 1929, for example, the conference accepted an EIA resolution that 'our leaders shall place the policy of Empire development...in the forefront of the Party programme'¹⁵¹. The EIA saw that influencing Conservative policy in this way was essential, but 'by far', the most important aim of the EIA was to recruit to its cause Conservative members of the House of Commons and prospective parliamentary candidates. According to Page Croft, '[o]ver 280 Back Bench members of the Conservative Party belonged to the EIA in the 1924-29 Parliament', a very high proportion.¹⁵² This success was a fulfilment of the expectation that the inability of the Association to work with Labour would mean that the EIA and the Conservative Party were linked by an 'umbilical cord'.¹⁵³ This relationship, however, was not unique: the Junior Imperial League was similarly connected to the Conservative Party.

In 1932 the EIA saw, at last, the introduction of a tariff and thus, although it is difficult to assess the contribution it had made, it can still be reasonably described

¹⁴⁸ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, pp. 378-380.

¹⁴⁹ Croft, *My Life of Strife*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁰ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 374.

¹⁵¹ Croft, *My Life of Strife*, p. 180.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, p. 181. (419 Conservative MPs were elected to the 1924-29 Parliament of which approximately 350 were backbenchers or Parliamentary Private Secretaries.)

¹⁵³ Marrison, *British Business and Protection*, p. 371.

by Marrison as ‘arguably the most successful pressure group in the history of tariff reform’¹⁵⁴. The EIA continued to exist until well after the Second World War and campaigned in the 1960s against Britain joining the Common Market and for expansion of trade with the Commonwealth, led by Tory parliamentarians such as Derek Walker-Smith, Robin Turton and John Biggs-Davison. It amalgamated with the British Empire League in 1947, changed its name to Commonwealth Industries Association in 1958, and was wound up in 1976, four years after Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community, after the last of the major imperialist activists’ themes of the twentieth century, imperial preference, had finally withered. It was a theme that had reached its apotheosis in the early 1930s and to which Lord Beaverbrook made a notable contribution when he launched his Empire Crusade in June 1929.

Beaverbrook’s crusade sought imperial unity through a protectionist policy that he called ‘Empire Free Trade’. This was defined, in an advertisement in national newspapers in December 1929, as

‘[t]o develop the industries and resources of all parts of the British Empire to the fullest extent, and for that purpose to make of the Empire a single economic unit, removing as far as possible all obstacles of Freedom of Trade between its constituent parts... To erect such Tariffs between the British Empire and foreign countries as may be found necessary to realise these ideals’.¹⁵⁵

The advertisement also called upon members of the public to register their names and addresses if they supported the campaign. No subscription was called for. Within a few weeks 250,000 ‘founder members’ had enrolled and in February 1930 the lists were closed.

According to Gossel the Executive Committee in December 1929 included Beaverbrook, Patrick Hannon, Viscount Elibank, C.A. McCurdy, R.D. Blumenfield, Lord Melchett and Sir Hugh Cunliffe-Owen.¹⁵⁶ By March 1930 Melchett, Blumenfield and even Beaverbrook were no longer members of the Committee and had been replaced by Lord Islington, Lord Lovat, J.R. Remer MP, Col. Grant

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 379.

¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 10 December 1929.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Gossel, ‘The Empire Crusade and the United Empire Party’, in Christian Haase, p. 66.

Morden and others,¹⁵⁷ suggesting some fluidity in the early leadership of the Crusade. It was Beaverbrook, however, who was the driving force: '[f]rom the first [he] alone provided the drive and organisation' in his 'one-man campaign',¹⁵⁸ and 'made all the decisions himself'.¹⁵⁹ He was also energetic in conveying the message of the Crusade by making speeches frequently and publicising them in his newspaper, the *Daily Express*. Further propaganda was distributed in October 1929 in the form of 275,000 copies of a pamphlet, *Empire Free Trade*.

Beaverbrook sought to persuade Baldwin of the merits of his campaign and to gain his acceptance of a common imperial trade policy. He wanted Baldwin to agree to allow members of his Empire Crusade to be official Conservative party parliamentary candidates and to be given the opportunity to persuade Tory frontbenchers 'to declare for Empire Free Trade'.¹⁶⁰ Baldwin rejected these ideas and on 18 February 1930 Beaverbrook announced the formation of his United Empire Party. There followed a brief period in which Beaverbrook attempted to find common ground with Baldwin and believed that he had done so, but Conservative Central Office immediately publicly opposed food taxes and Beaverbrook considered that he had been 'swindled'.¹⁶¹ In response, Beaverbrook attacked Baldwin in his newspapers and called on Conservative supporters to transfer their subscriptions to his campaign. He also intervened vigorously in seven by-elections, between April 1930 and March 1931, campaigning for candidates who supported Empire Free Trade whether or not they were the official Tory candidate. In the last of these, at St George's Westminster, Baldwin made his famous allusion to the irresponsible use of the power of the press. The Conservative candidate defeated his United Empire opponent and Beaverbrook sought reconciliation with Baldwin and his party. The campaign had '[run] out of steam'. It had been a 'power struggle between Baldwin and Beaverbrook' in which the issue of imperial preference had eventually been subsumed into questions about the 'political role of the press'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ HLRO BBK/B/248.

¹⁵⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 273.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁶⁰ Gossel, 'The Empire Crusade', p. 69.

¹⁶¹ Taylor, *Beaverbrook*, p. 285.

¹⁶² Gossel, 'The Empire Crusade', p. 73.

The origin of the Indian Empire Society in March 1930 was rooted in a reaction to Lord Irwin's recommendations, made six months earlier, about the future governance of India. Lord Sydenham, a former governor of Bombay, initiated discussions with other individuals with experience of India and this led to its inaugural meeting in July. Leading figures at the meeting included Lord Sumner, a Tory die-hard and former appeal judge; Field Marshal Sir Claude Jacob, a former Chief of Staff in India; Sir Alfred Knox, MP, late of the Indian Army; Sir Michael O'Dwyer, former Lieut-Governor of Punjab; and Lord Meston, former Lieut-Governor of United Provinces. In addition to these and other retired officials, the Society eventually included a number of Tory backbenchers as well as members of the general public.¹⁶³ It was a small, active group; by January 1933 it claimed 1400 members led by a committee consisting 'with one exception...of men, including four MPs, with long and often recent Indian experience gained in the various Services, or as business men'.¹⁶⁴

The Society was principally concerned about the nature and pace of the proposed changes to the governance of India, claiming to be 'not in the least opposed to the political advancement of India provided there are proper safeguards' that preserved law and order and protected British interests.¹⁶⁵ This, however, perhaps understates the Society's position. At a meeting in December 1930 a resolution was passed without dissent declaring that there was a need to 'awaken public opinion...to a sense of the grave danger with which our Empire in India is threatened...paralysing the commerce and industry of both Great Britain and India'. Winston Churchill, who was a member of the IES, spoke at the meeting of the need to crush Gandhism and to make clear that Britain would not give up India. To do so would 'mark...the downfall of the British Empire'.¹⁶⁶ A few months later Churchill spoke at a mass meeting of the IES at the Albert Hall in March 1931, referring to the 'so-called Irwin-Gandhi Treaty' as 'a hideous act of self-mutilation'. A number of Tory MPs also spoke. The IES also attempted to influence parliament by providing its members with specimen letters to send to their MPs, one of which declared

¹⁶³ Gillian Peele, 'Revolt Over India', in *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939*, ed. by Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (London, 1975), pp. 114-145 (p. 126).

¹⁶⁴ Letter from leading members of IES, *The Times*, 19 January 1933.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from IES members, *The Times*, 7 January 1931.

¹⁶⁶ *The Times*, 12 December 1930.

emotionally: 'I hope you are making a stand with Mr Churchill against our Government giving away in India all that Clive and Warren Hastings...fought for and won'.¹⁶⁷ In an attempt to gain Tory grassroots support, the Society wrote to local association chairman suggesting that they pass resolutions in their constituencies urging the government to slow the pace of reform of Indian governance. Despite these activities, and the publication of its periodical *Indian Empire Review*, Gillian Peele argues that the Society was unsatisfactory in bringing the issues to public attention and believed that it needed to coordinate its work with other imperial activists.¹⁶⁸ It therefore moved its operations to premises in London occupied by the India Defence League, an organisation formed in June 1933.

According to Page Croft the creation of the IDL was a 'direct outcome of the activities of the UBI [Union of Britain and India]',¹⁶⁹ an organisation created by officials of Conservative Central Office to support the government's India policy, and whose efforts the IDL sought to frustrate. The IDL was led by a council consisting of fourteen peers, four knights and five military officers. Lord Sumner was its president, Lord Wolmer its chairman and, with Winston Churchill and Claud Jacob among its vice-presidents, for example, there was considerable overlap of leadership with that of the IES, whose members were offered 'honorary membership without further subscription'.¹⁷⁰ IDL membership, however, was much greater than that of the IES. Page Croft claimed in the House of Commons that 'we are in touch with...thousands of men recently returned from India who have joined the [IDL]',¹⁷¹ and *The Times* referred to the League having 'more than 50 groups, and each of these has a membership of from 50 to 500'.¹⁷²

The IES and the IDL 'conduct[ed] an integrated campaign against the government'.¹⁷³ In particular, the IDL was successful in influencing opinion in Tory constituency associations and this caused friction within the party. For example, Sir Edward Campbell, secretary of the Conservative India Parliamentary Committee,

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, 14 January 1933.

¹⁶⁸ Peele, 'Revolt Over India', p. 137.

¹⁶⁹ Page Croft, *My Life of Strife*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁰ Peele, 'Revolt Over India', p. 138.

¹⁷¹ *The Times*, 8 February 1935.

¹⁷² *The Times*, 8 December 1934.

¹⁷³ Peele, 'Revolt Over India', p. 138.

accused the IDL of using tactics that were underhand and ‘not quite cricket’. This self-contradictory outcome of seeking to win over Tory party members and yet at the same time alienating others was also characteristic of the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), as we shall see in later chapters. Sometimes constituency officials, such as Lord Hereford, president of the eponymous Tory party division, were made to resign because of their association with the IDL and this too resonates with the resignation of the Tory candidate for Bournemouth in 1958 when he was found to be consorting with members of the LEL.

The IDL opposed federal government in India and, like the IES, argued that the introduction of democracy should proceed very cautiously. It was vigorously active in its opposition to government policy and went so far as to support Randolph Churchill, a member of the Junior Imperial League, who stood as an independent Conservative in the Wavertree by-election in February 1935. By doing so, he split the Tory vote and let in the Labour candidate and at least one Tory MP resigned from the IDL as a protest against the IDL’s tactics. Somewhat inconsistently the IDL decided not to intervene in the Norwood by-election a few weeks later. In parliament, however, MPs who were members of the IDL tabled a large number of amendments to the third reading of the India Bill. Notwithstanding its campaigning, and with the imminent passing of the Bill, the IDL appears to have accepted defeat in a practical way by proposing in April that its name be changed to the Imperial Defence League and by drafting a new constitution.¹⁷⁴ In what form the IDL continued is not clear but its companion organisation, the IES, closed the offices it shared with the IDL when war came in 1939 and it was run from the home of its secretary, Sir Louis Stuart. As *The Times* observed, ‘the day of controversy at home over India had passed’.¹⁷⁵ And so too, with the notable exception of the League of Empire Loyalists after the war, had group imperial activism in general.

Except for the Expanding Commonwealth Group (eighteen upper-middle class backbench Tory MPs who formed the group in response to the rejection at the Conservative party conference in 1954 of a resolution to extend imperial preference) the only imperial activist organisation to appear after 1945 was the League of

¹⁷⁴ Churchill Archives, CHAR2/263.

¹⁷⁵ *The Times*, 29 December 1949.

Empire Loyalists. Its imperial interests have been largely overlooked by historians in favour of its perceived fascist connotations. This and other aspects of the League are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

The brief descriptions of imperial groups in this chapter provide a basis for attempting to draw some general conclusions about imperial activism in Britain in the twentieth century. (Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the imperial groups that have been discussed and will be used as the basic data in the discussion that follows.) The two groups that form the main body of this thesis, the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists, can thus be placed within the context of those conclusions and their relevance to imperial activism discussed in detail.

Table 2. An analysis of the characteristics of imperial activist groups

Organisation	Founded	Social/political?	General/specific? Geographical interest?	Elite/popular?	Size of membership in Britain	Pressure/interest?
Royal Colonial Institute	1868	Non-political	General Whole Empire?	Elite	Medium	Interest
Primrose League	1883	Political and social	General Whole Empire?	Popular with elite leadership	Very large	Interest
Imperial Federation League	1884	Political	Specific; governance. Dominions plus.	Elite	Medium?	Pressure
Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee	1894	Political	Specific; defence Dominions.	Elite	Small	Pressure
British Empire League	1895	Political	Specific; defence Whole Empire?	Elite	Medium?	Pressure
United Empire Trade League	1891	Political	Specific; trade	Elite	Small?	Pressure
Imperial South African Association	1896	Political	Specific; governance of SA. South Africa.	Elite	Small	Pressure
Victoria League	1901	Social(welfare)	General. Dominions and SGCs.	Elite	Medium	Interest
The League of the Empire	1901	Political	Specific; education. Dominions mainly.	Elite	Medium	Pressure
Empire Day Movement	1903	Social	Specific; mainly education.	Elite	Small?	Pressure(initially); then Interest
Tariff Reform League	1903	Political	Specific; trade. Dominions mainly.	Popular with middle-class leadership	Large	Pressure
Junior Imperial League	1906	Socio-political	General. Dominions mainly.	Popular with elite and middle-class leadership	Large	Interest with some pressure activities especially in the inter- war period.
The Round Table	1909	Political	Specific; governance and defence. Dominions. India.	Elite	Small?	Pressure
Overseas Club	1910	Social	Specific; kith and kin. Dominions mainly.	Elite	Medium	Interest
Patriotic League of Britons Overseas	1914	Social	Specific; kith and kin. Dominions mainly.	Elite	Small?	Interest
Empire Parliamentary Association	1911	Socio-political	General. Dominions plus some SGC's later.	Elite(in Britain)	Small	Interest
Empire Resources Development Committee	1916	Political	Specific; trade. Mainly Canada, SA and W. Africa.	Elite	Small	Pressure
British Commonwealth Union	1916	Political	Specific; trade. Whole Empire.	Elite	Small	Pressure
British Empire Union	1915	Political	General. Whole Empire?	Elite leadership	Medium	Pressure
The Women's Guild of Empire	c.1914	Political	General.	Working-class	Medium	Pressure
Empire Development Union	1922	Political	Specific; trade	Elite	Small	Pressure
Empire Industries Association	1925	Political	Specific; trade	Elite	Small	Pressure
Empire Crusade	1929	Political	Specific; trade. Dominions mainly.	Elite leadership of all classes	Large	Pressure
Indian Empire Society	1930	Political	Specific; governance of India.	Elite	Small	Pressure
India Defence League	1933	Political	Specific; governance of India.	Elite	Medium	Pressure
League of Empire Loyalists	1954	Political	General. Whole Empire.	Middle class	Small	Pressure
Expanding Commonwealth Group	1950s	Political	Specific; governance. Whole Empire.	Middle class	Very small	Pressure

The imperial activist organisations discussed in this chapter are predominantly pressure groups, that is, as discussed in the Introduction, groups who apply pressure to politicians, decision makers and members of the general public, in pursuit of their imperialist objectives. Interest groups, who are not seeking change but simply wish to enjoy and celebrate the Empire, are a small minority. It is interesting to note that interest groups were formed in the early years of imperial activism; no interest group was founded after the end of the First World War. This might suggest that there was a decline in general interest in the Empire or simply that the existing organisations were sustained and therefore satisfied this general need. Indeed Gillian Peele has suggested that ‘in the inter-war period...empire...was simply accepted as a part of the existing order of things...like the monarchy and the weather’.¹⁷⁶ This could imply that groups between the wars were only formed when a *specific* imperial issue arose, such as trade preference or the constitution of India. In spite of their early emergence, however, interest groups have generally enjoyed greater longevity than pressure groups; for example, at the time of writing, the Royal Colonial Institute and the Victoria League still exist. This may be because their *raison d’être* enabled them to adapt to changing circumstances and they were not tied to a specific, and thus more transient, economic or political objective. Interest groups’ adaptable, recreational, relatively non-political interest in the Empire was an important factor in their long-term survival. They were for people who wished to celebrate and enjoy the Empire rather than attempt to change it. The Junior Imperial League, which existed for forty years, helps to illustrate this but it is unusual in combining characteristics of both pressure and interest groups.

Pressure groups tended to address a single interest or narrow range of interests. Only the British Empire Union, the Women’s Guild of Empire and the League of Empire Loyalists were pressure groups with general, wide-ranging imperial concerns. Because pressure groups sought change and actively campaigned for it, they were also more political than interest groups. The specific imperial concerns of the groups were usually political integration, defence, trade and education. All of these matters expressed a desire for some form of increased

¹⁷⁶ Peele, ‘Revolt Over India’, p. 114.

imperial unity and this in its many, often vague, forms was the essential motivating force of imperial activism. Ideas, however, were often incoherent or lacked clarity and political realism.

The multiplicity of imperial activist groups, comprising both pressure and interest groups, also demonstrates the fragmented and perhaps cliquish nature of imperial activism. To overcome this, groups sometimes merged, or more often, tried (unsuccessfully) to do so. In 1933, for example, the Dominions Office instigated negotiations between a number of groups, including the Royal Empire Society, the Overseas League, the British Empire League, the Victoria League, the League of the Empire and the Empire Day Movement with a view to more closely co-ordinating their activities but it appears to have come to nothing.¹⁷⁷

Although groups often claimed to embrace the entire Empire, or a large proportion of it, Empire usually meant, in practice, just the Dominions, sometimes with the addition of self-governing colonies such as Rhodesia. Imperial activist groups were thus racially based in the sense that they prioritised relations with the 'white' Dominions and colonies. For many years after the racially unifying idea of 'Greater Britain' was mooted and subsequently failed to come about, it lingered in the minds of imperial activists. Even after the Second World War during the process of granting independence to Britain's colonies, few, except the League of Empire Loyalists, cared much about the (non-white) dependencies. This analysis therefore supports Andrew Thompson's view that it is wrong for historians to conclude that the Empire was primarily about the dependencies. It was the Dominions on which imperial activists generally concentrated their attention.

The leaders of the groups were almost always from the right-wing of the political spectrum (notable exceptions are the Women's Guild of Empire and the British Workers League) and it is a reasonable assumption therefore, in the absence of membership lists, that this was also largely true of individual members of the groups. It would be wrong, however, not to be aware that the Primrose League, the British Empire Union and the Junior Imperial League had (probably right-wing)

¹⁷⁷ *The Times*, 21 November 1933.

working-class members, the first of these in substantial numbers. The Empire Crusade membership may also have done so, if Beaverbrook's recruitment campaign was successful with his *Daily Express* readers. Many organisations claimed to be non-party but the Primrose League and the Junior Imperial League were very closely associated with the Conservative party whilst claiming to be independent of it. Several of the groups worked closely with Tory MPs by persuading them to argue their case in parliament or by campaigning on their behalf. Also, as has already been noted, members of parliament, predominantly from the right, were members of imperial pressure groups. The Junior Imperial League campaigned extensively for Tory candidates and was progressively integrated into the Conservative party organisation. One may reasonably conclude from these facts that, unsurprisingly, imperial activism was very largely, but certainly not exclusively, a right-wing phenomenon and included support from all classes. Richard Price may be right to argue that the working-class did not care much about the Empire at the very beginning of the century¹⁷⁸ but some of them clearly did during its first half even though, as already discussed, the TRL found recruiting working-class people difficult, and, as we shall see, the Junior Imperial League also had problems with working-class membership.

A much less ambiguous picture can be painted of the class composition of the leadership of the groups. Aristocrats were active in all the groups in the period up to the beginning of the First World War and in many of them thereafter. Often, however, they seem to have been figure-heads appointed, for example, as vice-presidents who would thus make a financial contribution to the organisation. Elite names on headed notepaper could also appear to add gravitas to an organisation, a point that A. K. Chesterton understood in creating the League of Empire Loyalists. After the First World War businessmen emerged more strongly in leadership roles. This may have been a combination of the increasing professionalisation of society, the emergence of a larger middle class (which McKibbin has described)¹⁷⁹ and the shift in imperial activism away from governance of the Empire (at the end of the nineteenth century) and imperial defence (in the two decades before the First World War) towards greater emphasis on imperial trade (in the inter-war years). Generally

¹⁷⁸ Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (London, 1972).

¹⁷⁹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures England 1918-1952* (Oxford, 1998), p. 46.

throughout the period (upper) middle-class men managed the affairs of the groups with individuals such as Patrick Hannon and Frederick Pollock being involved in several of them.

It is sometimes difficult to establish a clear picture of the membership numbers of the various organisations. With the notable exception of the Primrose League, organisations did not generally have more than a few tens of thousands of members. There is perhaps a correlation between size of organisation and the narrowness of its objectives, that is to say, the more focused it was the smaller its membership. Thus pressure groups were generally smaller than interest groups. Overall one might conclude that the level of *active* interest in the Empire in Britain was not great.

The survey of imperial interest groups contained in this chapter has relied heavily on the published work of historians who have written selectively about them. None has completed a 'full' survey and attempted to draw general conclusions about imperial activism. Furthermore, in being selective, they have almost entirely ignored any extensive analysis of two important groups that are relevant to the question of who cared about the British Empire: the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists. The next five chapters address this omission beginning with a discussion of the emergence of the JIL in 1905.

Chapter 2. The Junior Imperial League 1905-1918

The founding of the League

Youth, Unionism, and Empire were the key themes at the inaugural public meeting of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League (JIL) which was held on Wednesday, 19 December 1906 at the Queen's Hall in Langham Place, London. Accompanied by other members of the nobility, Lord Castlereagh was in the chair. He was a twenty-eight year old army officer who had been 'cajoled' into politics by his father, the marquess of Londonderry¹, and elected Unionist MP for Maidstone at the general election earlier that year. This aristocratic leadership presided over a 'good attendance', according to *The Times*,² that included several young, middle-class men who aspired to political careers. The Unionist credentials of the League were demonstrated by the presence at the meeting of the chairman of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, H.M. Imbert-Terry, and its secretary, A.E. Southall. They represented an older generation of politics than the word 'Junior' in the League's title might suggest, having been born in the middle years of the nineteenth century but they demonstrated public recognition of the League by the party's administrators.

The political leadership of the party also gave support. Letters received from Arthur Balfour, the leader of the Unionist party, and from Austen Chamberlain, were read to the meeting. Their content gives an important insight into leading Tories' perceptions of the League. Balfour referred to 'enlist[ing] the services of the younger generation on behalf of the Conservative and Unionist cause' which had 'Imperial and Colonial ideals' and to a policy of social reform that were 'attractive to the youth of the nation'. Chamberlain, who had been Chancellor of the Exchequer for the last two years of the Balfour administration that had ended in December 1905, believed that the participation of young men in the work of the Unionist party was 'of the first importance to our future success' not only in social reform at home but 'to realize the universal aspiration of the British race for closer union---commercial, political and defensive' of the 'great [British] Imperial edifice'. In concluding the meeting,

¹ ODNB.

² *The Times*, 20 December 1906.

Lord Percy, MP for South Kensington, explained that the purpose of the League was to persuade young men of the importance of participating in politics.³

Percy (1871-1909), an established politician and the eldest son of the seventh duke of Northumberland, was a member of parliament from 1895 until his death. He had served as parliamentary under-secretary, first for India in 1902, and then next year at the Foreign Office. Another aristocrat present was Lord Wolmer (1887-1971), at that time secretary of Oxford University Conservative Committee. He was heir to Lord Selborne and the grandson of Lord Salisbury, prime minister until 1902, and was to be an MP from 1910 until 1940, supporting Winston Churchill in his opposition to the India Bill in 1935. Percy and Wolmer were young men representative of long-standing Tory aristocracy but, as already noted, their colleagues at the inaugural meeting were a group of young middle-class men. It was they who had undertaken the preliminary work necessary to make the inaugural meeting possible.

Although the meeting took place at the end of a year in which the Conservatives had experienced a major defeat at a general election, it should not be inferred that that defeat initiated the desire to organise Tory youth. The first intimations of this occurred in 1905, six months before the general election. On 28 June, the idea of such an organisation was discussed at the Junior Carlton Club at a meeting of ‘about twenty young...candidates for Parliament and the [London] County Council’,⁴ organised by Albert Southall. Except for Danford Thomas, later treasurer of the League, it is not clear who was present. He recalled in February 1930 that the meeting was influenced by Joseph Chamberlain’s belief in imperial preference; some present at the meeting therefore declared that ‘we must be imperial’. Others were concerned with the Irish question which they regarded as unsettled. The constitution was therefore of considerable importance to them: ‘for all time Conservatives and Unionists alike would maintain what is known as the Constitution’.⁵ These views of those present give only an outline sketch of political

³ *The Times*, 20 December 1906.

⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (March 1930), 5.

⁵ *The Imp*, 5 (March 1930), 5.

priorities but it is possible to paint a somewhat fuller picture of the social characteristics of the League's founders.

On 1 November 1905, sixteen individuals, whose names have been listed in the League's records, attended a 'preliminary meeting' at the Junior Constitutional Club. Examination of the biographical details of the sixteen suggests their common characteristics. Those present were: Arthur du Cros (in the chair), R.E. Belilios, W.B. Boyd-Carpenter, Spencer Brett, J.B. Caldwell, G. Cartwright, Lewis Hunter, J.H. Lambert, J. Seymour Lloyd, W.J. Marshall, A. Moy, M.M. Shattock, Percy Simner, with G.W. Borwick and A.E. Southall as honorary secretaries. Letters of apology were received from E.R. Bird, P. Elgee and Wilfred Evans.⁶ To these can be added F. Danford Thomas, C.E. Renouf and S.J.M. Sampson, the latter two being present at the Queen's Hall meeting in December 1906. It would be unwise to draw firm conclusions about the homogeneity of the entire group from the sparse personal details of these individuals extracted from *The Times*, the 1901 census and the *Dictionary of National Biography* but we can, however, draw some tentative conclusions.

First, the founders were exclusively male. H.I.P. Hallett, who was honorary secretary of the League from 1909 to 1939, later recalled that initially the League had no female members until 1914 and even then very few.⁷ However, a Miss Bond, a member of the Reading branch, spoke at the League's annual conference in April 1913⁸ but that is the only reference to a woman in the League's extant minute books for the period before the Great War. The League was clearly reluctant to involve women even in its social activities. At a meeting of the executive committee in July 1908, members were encouraged to invite guests to a forthcoming dinner but the minute was subsequently amended to make clear that this meant male guests.⁹ The group also comprised a particular historical cohort: those for whom dates of birth have been established were not youths but young men, aged between 25 and 38 years, whose adolescent years occurred during a period of high Victorian imperialism and before British industrial and military prestige was perceived, in the

⁶ Bodleian Library (hereafter 'Bodn.') Conservative Party Archive (hereafter 'CPA') CCO506/1/1.

⁷ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 11.

⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2.

⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1.

early years of the new century, to be threatened by foreign powers. They were also firmly middle class; some had private means and others earned a living through the professions, trade and industry. They were typical examples of what Ross McKibbin has called the 'old' middle class whose members entered 'the church, the law, medicine or the armed services' and governed the empire. They were largely members of professions that were 'pre- or non-industrial',¹⁰ (although du Cros and Borwick certainly represented a technical and industrial middle class that was to become dominant in the nineteen-thirties). Importantly for them, their political interests and activities enabled them to meet the nobility not simply politically but socially as well. For example, Raphael Belilios dined with Lord Farquhar at his residence in March 1909 alongside peers, MPs and members of the London County Council.¹¹ They were militarily conscientious, several of them serving in peacetime volunteer regiments and also in the Great War. Finally, they were urban and predominantly metropolitan. All lived in London or nearby at addresses such as Piccadilly, Princes gate, Westminster and Philbeach gardens, Kensington.¹² This metropolitanism is to some extent reflected in the constituencies they contested in pursuit of their most pervasive and salient common characteristic, political ambition. Table 3 is an analysis of these constituencies.

¹⁰ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 46 , p.529.

¹¹ *The Times*, March 24 1909.

¹² 1901 Census.

Table 3. Percentage of Unionist vote at general elections 1900-1910¹³

(An asterisk indicates when and where a JICL member stood as a candidate.)

Constituency	1900	1906	1910 Jan	1910 Nov
Newington West	41.8	35.3*	47.5	46.4*
Newington Walworth	58.1	43.1	48.6*	48.0
Tower Hamlets (Limehouse)	55.8	40.2	45.9*	45.4
Tower Hamlets (Poplar)	41.6	33.0*	42.7	35.1
Tower Hamlets (Bow and Bromley)	63.3	46.4*	41.9*	44.4
Rochdale	50.1	44.3	44.9*	48.1
Blackburn	61.3	50.1	43.4	47.3*
Liverpool (Scotland)	42.1	28.5	20.9*	21.9

The five metropolitan constituencies were all in working class areas of East London. This geographical affinity between a particular part of London and the earliest members of the League is strengthened further by the two founder members who fought London County Council seats in Hackney and Shoreditch and by two politicians who joined the League's Council in 1907; Claude Hay who was elected MP for Hoxton in 1900 and again in 1906, and H.S. Samuel who lost his Limehouse parliamentary seat in the latter year. The pattern of results in Table 3 also suggests that, with the exception of Bow and Bromley in 1906, the Unionist candidates were minor politicians learning their political trade rather than being given safer Unionist seats which would have given them a strong chance of entering parliament at the first attempt. The seats that they fought were working class constituencies that were, more than usually, inclined to vote Conservative. (The presence of three Lancashire constituencies in Table 3 is perhaps explained by the fact that such constituencies

¹³ Derived from Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London, 1967).

were concentrated in ‘Lancashire, in Birmingham, [and] in East or South London’.)¹⁴ In sum, the socio-political portrait of these founder members of the League shows a group of young Edwardian middle-class men, led by the aristocracy, attempting to build the foundations of their political careers by persuading the urban working class of the merits of Unionism. But why was it felt necessary to organise younger Unionist politicians in this way at this particular time?

The answer to that question may lie in two main areas. First, the beginnings of a more general process of the organisation of young people both politically and more generally. Martin Pugh has referred to it as the ‘current fashion’.¹⁵ However, the recollection of Hallett in 1939 was that: ‘[i]t was considered an impertinence for young men to take part in politics in [those] days’, but nevertheless ‘Arthur Balfour, Bonar Law, and Sir Alexander Acland-Hood...Chief Whip, recognised more than the rank and file the necessity of a strong youth movement in the Party...’.¹⁶ Other political parties agreed. The League of Young Liberals was founded in 1903 and it was also a time when socialists were seen to be making rapid progress in educating young people in radical principles.¹⁷ There were also a number of junior Unionist and Conservative associations already in existence and in 1910 the League of Young Conservatives was formed under the presidency of the diehard Lord Willoughby de Broke, later a vice-president of the League. The second causal factor was the state of the Tory party, both politically and organisationally; it was not conducive to successful electoral campaigning and reform was desirable and necessary.

The Unionists formed the party of imperialism but their enthusiasm for empire was tempered by the Boer War which had demonstrated that Britain had had more difficulty in dealing with its opponents than was commensurate with its geopolitical power and prestige. The desire, therefore, to renew Britain’s imperialism was expressed by Joseph Chamberlain, the colonial secretary, in a major speech in Birmingham in May 1903 in which he called for imperial preference. He and Leo Maxse then set up the Tariff Reform League in July 1903 to press for imperial fiscal reform. The policy was, however, fissiparous and the Conservative party divided into

¹⁴ Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, p. 420.

¹⁵ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 41.

¹⁶ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 11.

¹⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Annual General Meeting 1908.

a faction that supported Chamberlain; those who opposed his ideas and argued for free trade; and a central group that attempted to bridge the two arguments and who were loyal to Balfour, the prime minister.¹⁸ Although by 1905, most Tories were in favour of tariff reform of some sort, the split in the party proved electorally damaging and a number of defeats in by-elections were suffered in 1903, 1904 and 1905. Furthermore it seemed likely that the different factions would try to gain the support of various local party associations thus further exacerbating divisions in the party. By late 1905 there were expectations of a general election that were fulfilled in January 1906, immediately after Balfour's resignation as prime minister in December. Despite these expectations, the party organisation was weak and Balfour received advice from his Parliamentary Secretary, J.S. Sandars that agents throughout the country were desperately calling for more time to prepare for an election.¹⁹ To add to these organisational difficulties, the 'main issue [at the election] was undoubtedly Free Trade'²⁰ and consequently the divided Unionists were heavily defeated. Such a defeat was a catalyst for re-organisation of the party.

It may be over-stating the case, however, to say that 'it was then [after the election] that the demands [for reorganisation] began'.²¹ Even the League itself forgot its own history, recording in its journal in 1928 that it was after the general election of 1906 that 'with the spirits and hopes of the Party at their lowest ebb, that a number of enthusiastic Juniors decided to form the...League'.²² In fact, demands had been made *before* the election; but it was only after it that words turned into deeds and organisational reform began. Before the defeat, in November 1905, at the party conference at Newcastle, a resolution had been passed calling for the 'strengthen[ing of] the central management of the business of the Conservative party by the addition of a popular representative element in close touch with the constituencies...'.²³ This was followed, in February 1906, by a letter to the constituencies signed by the president, chairman and divisional chairmen of the National Union referring to 'the defects which exist in our organisation [that] must

¹⁸ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940* (London and New York, 1978).

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 18.

²⁰ Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, p. 20.

²¹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p. 20.

²² *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 4.

²³ *The Times*, 15 November 1905.

be remedied and the political machinery improved or renewed in all its branches'.²⁴ Leo Maxse observed at a meeting of the National Union of Constitutional and Conservative Associations in July 1906, that 'the machinery of the party was antiquated' and that the Newcastle resolution would have been ignored had it not been for 'the catastrophe of the general election'.²⁵ That the necessity to implement change was manifest before the election is also demonstrated by the fact that the founders of the Junior Imperial League held a 'preliminary meeting' initiating the definition of its objects and membership in the same month as the Newcastle meeting.²⁶ This is not coincidental because Albert Southall was present at both events and would have been aware of how a policy of popular representation and greater involvement in party matters might be applied to a group of young politicians in London. The close relationship between the nascent League and the senior organisation is also apparent in H. H. Cannell's recollection that in 1905 he 'had been consulted by headquarters of the National Union in drafting rules and making suggestions in connection with the "aims and objects" of a junior organisation'.²⁷ A further example of the close relationships between the senior organisation and the early members of the League can be seen in the fact that Castlereagh's father, Lord Londonderry, was a member of the Re-organisation Liaison Committee set up by the Newcastle resolution. It would be reasonable to infer that the formation of League was part of a wider effort to make the Conservative party a more effective electoral machine that recognised the importance of influencing younger men. This, wittingly or not, anticipated the expansion of the electorate in 1918 to include all men over the age of twenty-one. In 1906 only about half of adult men had the vote.

Albert Southall was a major figure in the formation of the League. It was he who convened the early, exploratory meetings of the proposed organisation. This does not necessarily mean that the original idea was his or that he was acting on his own initiative independently of the Unionist party but there is no reference, in the minutes of the National Union executive committee at the time, to any plan to create the League.²⁸ Southall certainly had the standing and contacts in the party to be able

²⁴ Bodn. CPA NUA4/1/1.

²⁵ *The Times*, 28 July 1906.

²⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1.

²⁷ *The Imp*, 1 (March 1926), 2.

²⁸ Bodn. CPA NUA 4/1/1.

to take such an initiative. He had been secretary to the National Union since 1884 and was widely respected in the Unionist party having been presented by Balfour in June 1904 with an award for twenty years' service as secretary of the NUCUA. He was an experienced and mature political administrator, based in London, with a wide range of connections within the party. At various times he had been secretary of the metropolitan division of the National Union, divisional officer of the metropolitan division and a member of the political committee of the Junior Constitutional Club. Important though his work was in the early days of the League, it was short-lived and he retired from active political life through ill health in July 1907.²⁹

A second meeting in November 1905 of the League's founders took the form of a provisional committee. The full name of the League was agreed, the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, and the objects of the League were decided. These were:

To create a practical interest in political work and organisation among the younger members of the Conservative and Unionist Party, by forming a centre in the Metropolis, with branches to co-operate with existing Conservative and Unionist bodies, with a view to advancing the cause of Imperial Unity, uphold[ing] constitutional principles, and actively further[ing] the Unionist cause.

The terms 'metropolitan', 'practical' and 'co-operate' convey a desire for a non-theoretical, business-like approach to politics focused on London and its surrounding areas. For example, Sir Alexander Acland-Hood, the Unionist party chief whip, agreed to write to constituency 'chairmen and secretaries *in the metropolis* asking for their co-operation and support in connection with the League' (emphasis added).³⁰

The League was not intended to be merely a debating society but a political resource to be used within the party to which it was loyal, in pursuit of imperialism and constitutionalism. (Members were required to declare their belief in, and support for, Unionist principles.) It is worth noting the use of the word 'younger' rather than

²⁹ *The Times*, 12 July 1907.

³⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1.

‘young’ suggesting an uncertainty about what any upper age limit for members should be. As we have seen, some of the founders were approaching middle age.

The early growth of the League

The League saw the expansion of its membership as a key objective and it pursued it by individual officials writing to the chairmen and secretaries of local party associations. The League’s policy was to encourage the setting up of branches and the affiliation to the League of existing junior associations. A resolution was passed at the annual general meeting in 1908 calling for the latter to affiliate and ‘thus bind together the Junior Associations throughout the British Isles’.³¹

It is difficult to construct an accurate picture of the growth of the League in its early years because although new branches and affiliations were routinely recorded in the minutes of Council meetings it was not done comprehensively. The first record of specific branches is in July 1907 when Bath Junior Conservative Association and Bedford Junior Unionist Association affiliated.³² There were, however, six branches by the end of 1906 only one of which, the Central Hackney Unionist Pioneers, can be identified from the records. Its formation coincided with, but was quite separate from, that of the League but to which it immediately decided to affiliate.³³ Table 5 lists the early branches formed by about the end of 1908 that can be identified from the records. Table 4 shows the overall growth in the number of branches between 1906 and 1914.

³¹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Annual General Meeting March 1908.

³² Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1.

³³ *Torchbearer*, 1 (November 1937), 132.

Table 4. Growth in number of League Branches 1906-1914

Date	No. of branches	Total membership	Source Bodn. CPA (unless otherwise stated)
December 1906	6		
December 1908	28 (est.)		
January 1909	30		<i>Torchbearer March 1939</i>
September 1909	40	12,000	CCO 506/1/1
January 1910	30 (sic)	3,000 (sic)	Letter from Hon. Sec. March 1911
July 1910	117		CCO 506/1/1
March 1911	180	Over 45,000	CCO 506/1/1
January 1912	280	70,000	CCO 506/1/1
November 1912	330		CCO 506/1/1
April 1913	350	Over 100,000	CCO 506/1/1
February 1914	356		CCO 506/1/1

There are two striking features about the membership of the League from its inception to the Great War. First, its slow initial growth: it took over three years for forty branches with a total membership of 12,000 to join the League. Secondly, from the beginning of 1910 until the beginning of 1912, it grew very rapidly adding an average of ten branches each month. Growth continued in the next two years but much more slowly, averaging only about three new branches each month. We should perhaps be cautious about accepting uncritically the number of reported branches. The figures were published by the leaders of the League and might, therefore, have been overstated for the purposes of good publicity. Certainly the Coventry branch failed in 1908³⁴ and at the Annual General Meeting in 1912 it was reported that some ‘branches had fallen into an unsatisfactory state’ and needed to be revived.³⁵ It may also be significant that the sole example of an *internal* document stating the figures

³⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Council meeting, July 1908.

³⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Annual General Meeting, February 1912.

(in January 1910) shows fewer branches and a much lower average branch membership. However, if we accept the total membership figures at face value, the average branch membership was about 250. By comparison, the Primrose League average membership in its early days in the 1880s was 237 in the twenty-five constituencies where the first Junior Imperial League branches existed (See Table 5). The Primrose League also had 259 Juvenile Branches with 65,000 members by 1913, an average membership of 250.³⁶ It would appear, therefore, that the strengths of branch membership of the two Tory organisations were very similar although the Primrose League would have had a greater potential for membership than the Junior Imperial League because it drew its members from both men and women.

The nature of the early impetus of the growth of the League can be assessed to some extent by the data in Table 5. This lists the first twenty-five branches of the League, as far as they can be determined from the records, up until April 1909. It correlates reasonably closely with the total of thirty branches by January 1909 shown in Table 4. (The data on voting, social categories and geographical regions have been taken from Pelling's work on elections.)³⁷ Nineteen of the branches (75%) were in the London area or its immediate environs. No social class predominated: four branches (26.7%) were predominantly middle class, six (40.0%) were mainly working class and five (33.3%) were of mixed social class. Almost three-quarters of the branches were in constituencies lost by the Tories in the 1906 election, only three in constituencies they successfully defended and two in constituencies that were not held by a Tory at either election. In comparison, 245 Tory candidates out of a total parliamentary strength of 670 MPs lost their seats in the 1906 election, that is to say 36.6% of the total.

The slow initial growth in membership may have had administrative causes. Its early years were difficult for the League. In December 1909 it still had 'no headquarters, no staff and no organisation' according to its newly appointed honorary secretary, H.I.P. Hallett.³⁸ In July 1907 the League had lost its secretary,

³⁶ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 41.

³⁷ Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*.

³⁸ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 11.

Albert Southall, and its chairman Arthur du Cros³⁹; both had resigned through ill health. An attempt to appoint the new secretary of the National Union, Thomas Cox, as secretary of the League, thus continuing the close relationship between the two organisations that had been personified by Southall, was rebuffed by the National Union. Cox reported to the National Union executive committee that he had been advised by the League that ‘the position did not involve any actual work[!]’ but nevertheless the committee did not approve of any official connection between Cox and the League.⁴⁰ Without a chairman or secretary the effectiveness of the League was attenuated.

The League’s finances

In December 1907, Imbert-Terry (1854-1938) agreed to become chairman of the League. He was a member of ‘an ancient French family whose records go back to the days of the Knights Templar’.⁴¹ He was educated at Charterhouse and his interest in politics led him to stand, although unsuccessfully, for election to parliament four times between 1882 and 1892. His appointment greatly strengthened the relationship between the senior organisation and the League; he was chairman of the National Union of Conservative Associations between 1906 and 1908 and served as chairman of the Junior Imperial League for twenty-five years. He was quickly into his stride by late 1907. At the Council meeting in February 1908 he announced that the League was unable to meet its financial obligations and could not afford the services of its paid full-time organising agent, H.H. Cannell, who had been appointed in February 1907. Attempts by the League to raise funds for its activities had not been successful. The fifty founder members had been asked to contribute £1 each⁴² but by July 1907 only twenty-one had done so and the acting chairman, Percy Simner, had taken the line that there were ‘sometimes special circumstances where...members...should not be burdened with a Monetary obligation’.⁴³ It is difficult to draw the conclusion from this cryptic remark that middle class founders with aspirations to enter right-wing politics could not afford the subscription. It suggests, rather, a lack of full commitment on their part to the League’s affairs.

³⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Council meeting July 1907.

⁴⁰ Bodn. CPA NUA 4/1/1 Executive committee October 1907.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 4 January 1938.

⁴² Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Council meeting July 1907.

⁴³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Council meeting October 1907.

The League's annual subscription structure called for five shillings from ordinary members (reduced in March 1908 to 2s.6d), £1.1.0 from honorary members and £5.5.0 from vice-presidents (of which there were three)⁴⁴. Branches paid an affiliation fee of 10s. 6d. (reduced from February 1910 to 5s.). These reductions recognised the unattractiveness of the original subscription structure. By comparison, the Primrose League subscriptions ranged between 3d and 2s.6d depending on the grade of membership.⁴⁵ In addition to these obligatory payments, Council members were encouraged to approach friends for donations but in June 1907 it was decided not to approach members of the two houses of parliament 'for the present'.⁴⁶ The net result of these diffident efforts, and of expenditure incurred, was that by October 1907, after almost two years since its public launch, the League had received £161.19.0, made payments of £118.16.10 and owed £112.0.0, a shortfall in funds of about £70. These sums are miniscule when compared with, for example, the Tariff Reform League which by January 1904 'had already spent £50,000' since its inception the previous year,⁴⁷ or with the Primrose League whose 'central organisation functioned, at the end of the nineteenth century, on a fairly modest income of around £7000'.⁴⁸ Between 1906 and 1918 the League's available funds never exceeded £1500 at any one time.⁴⁹ Even as late as 1936, the approximate cost of running the League was reported as being only £6,234.⁵⁰ Lack of financial resources was therefore both a chronic and an acute problem, as illustrated by the remark of Cuthbert Morley Headlam, chairman of the Durham county Conservative organisation, in November 1937 that: 'without more money the League can never be of much more value than it is at present and it appears that the money is not forthcoming'.⁵¹ Such financial straits were not untypical of the Tory party at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1907, for example, the National Union reported liabilities of £3,886 and cash at the bank of only £129, a situation alleviated

⁴⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Council meeting November 1905.

⁴⁵ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Council meeting June 1907.

⁴⁷ Richard A. Rempel, *Unionists Divided: Arthur Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders* (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1972), p. 68.

⁴⁸ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Finance committee February 1918.

⁵⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/4/10 The Palmer Report.

⁵¹ Cuthbert Morley Headlam, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries*, ed. by Stuart Ball (Cambridge, 1999), p. 117.

by the generosity of Sir Alex Acland-Hood MP who offered to provide £8,500 per month to the Union.⁵²

Although a finance committee was appointed in November 1906 there are no records of its meetings until May 1910 so it is difficult to establish complete details of the League's financial activities during that period. The resignation of the treasurer, C.H. Hoare, in December 1908, not simply from office but from the League as well, may be indicative of financial problems. At the end of the financial year, the new treasurer was unable to produce the accounts for 1909 because the 'finances had not been sufficiently disentangled'.⁵³ Whatever Hoare's shortcomings may have been, fundraising was clearly an issue. In February 1910 at the annual general meeting, Imbert-Terry announced that an 'immediate grant of money would...be made to the League to keep it going'.⁵⁴ The money came from Acland-Hood who had also agreed to pay certain office expenses and the salary of a part-time secretary. In April 1910, Castlereagh at last wrote to MPs, peers, candidates and agents, and raised about £330 from their donations. In addition, annual subscriptions amounted to fifty-five guineas and affiliation fees brought in £25. As a result, with '£500 in hand' the League's financial position was said to be 'much improved'.⁵⁵ However, this improvement was not to last. Many of the branches failed to pay amounts due to headquarters and following a thorough investigation the Finance committee regretted 'how large and how much overdue some of the amounts were'.⁵⁶

By late 1911 the crisis was manifest. At meetings of the executive committee and Council on September 13, Imbert-Terry once again drew attention to the grave financial situation of the League. He had, however, a proposal to put to the meeting which would alleviate the League's lack of resources. Arthur Steel-Maitland, appointed chairman of the Conservative party in June 1910 with responsibilities that included party finance and organisation,⁵⁷ had offered to make available office

⁵² Bodn. CPA NUA4/1/1 NU Executive committee June 1907.

⁵³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Annual General Meeting February 1910.

⁵⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1.

⁵⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Executive committee May 1910.

⁵⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/1 Finance committee September 1911.

⁵⁷ E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), p. 72.

accommodation at Central Office. Although the League would now become 'part and parcel' of Central Office, the new arrangements 'would [not] affect the League's liberty of opinion'. It would still be possible to 'differ from the official policy' of the party. Rejection of the offer, Imbert-Terry explained, would mean the continuation of the League's financial difficulties. Despite these misgivings about the autonomy of the League, the Council decided unanimously to accept Steel-Maitland's offer.⁵⁸

Why was the League so weak financially? It may have been because the League's central organisation lacked commitment to the general management of its affairs. Another factor may have been that the branches were seen as the principal fundraisers but using local funds for local activities. This was certainly the case in the Primrose League.⁵⁹ Central costs included cost of a small staff (partly funded by central office), the supply of literature, lantern-slide lectures and the attempted production of a regular publication. The failure of even its own founder members, middle class men of financial substance, to meet their financial obligations to the League; the weakness of the central organisation in not pursuing more vigorously for subscriptions; and the reliance on donations from the central organisation of the party, all suggest the League's leaders were not wholeheartedly committed to the League's objectives much beyond encouraging the formation of new branches. The League lacked a strong, central and national message, unlike, say, the Tariff Reform League which attracted large sums of money to support its campaign. It also had no well-known leader to compare with Joseph Chamberlain whose very presence attracted financial resources. After his incapacitating illness in July 1906 the Tariff Reform League's finances weakened. It may well be that only a strong, nationally recognised leader with a clear message is capable of securing good financial backing for a political cause.

The League now entered a period of financial stability, receiving regular payments from the National Union of Conservative Associations amounting to several hundred pounds a year. The treasurer, Danford Thomas, was able to report at the AGM in April 1913 that the League was in a 'sound financial position'.⁶⁰ By

⁵⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/1 Council and Executive committee September 1911.

⁵⁹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/1.

February 1918, with its expenditure much reduced by the suspension of activities during the war but with its subscriptions and other sources of income still at pre-war levels, the League was able set aside £1000 by the purchase of War bonds. Even so, we should not lose sight of the fact that its financial resources were inadequate for an institution that had ambitions to organise the right-wing youth of the country in pursuit of Unionist political knowledge and power. The achievement of its objectives was often constrained by lack of money.

If the years between 1908 and 1912 were especially difficult ones for the League financially, it was not helped by simultaneous turbulence in its administrative arrangements at the beginning of that period. The difficulties appear to have included the failure of the League's committees to meet and to act on decisions taken. At the annual general meeting in February 1910, Imbert-Terry was asked if the actions agreed at the previous annual meeting had been acted upon and replied that they had not. He was also asked how many times the Executive committee had met in the last twelve months. It had met only three times whereas it had been agreed that it should meet each month except August and September. Clearly the League was not functioning properly and was seen by some members as autocratic and over-cautious. However, the appointment as secretary in December 1909 of H.I.P. Hallett, Imbert-Terry's nephew, resolved the administrative problem in the long term; he remained in the post until February 1939.⁶¹ The League had now entered a long period of continuity of its major office holders. The chairman (Imbert-Terry), secretary (Hallett), treasurer (Danford Thomas) and organising secretary (Cannell) all held their respective offices continuously until well after the end of the First World War.

The ideology of the League

The League emerged during a time of significant social and political changes. There had been a growing interest in the British Empire in the closing years of the nineteenth century which had been tempered by the difficulties of the Boer War. For some, however, such as Joseph Chamberlain, the contributions made to the war by the self-governing colonies demonstrated not just the geo-political importance of the

⁶¹ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 11.

British Empire but the vital need to draw the self-governing colonies and Britain together to create a counter-balance to perceived economic and military threats from other nations and empires.

The Edwardian period was also a time when there was a growing participation of the middle classes in politics. Their 'rapprochement' with the aristocracy needed to be recognised and encouraged by Conservative party leaders.⁶² The Primrose League reflected this need in the last years of the Victorian period as did the Junior Imperial League in the Edwardian years. In both organisations there were good opportunities for different classes to mix together, or at least to be in each other's presence, for a common purpose.

Socialism and the electoral activities which brought Labour candidates into parliament were seen by Conservative politicians and voters as a potential threat to the stability of society and to the upper class and middle class domination of politics. It needed to be constrained by more effective organisation within the Conservative party. Part of the re-organisation was the need to bring to active politics the young men of the nation and Empire. More generally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and not necessarily within the realm of politics, youth was beginning to be organised: the Boys' Brigade in 1883, the Primrose [League] Buds in the 1890s and the Boy Scouts in 1907 are examples of this trend. Of particular contemporary political relevance to initiatives to organise Tory youth were the founding of the Young Liberals in 1903 and, earlier, the socialist Sunday schools.

Although one might argue that the founding members of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League were hardly youths but more exactly younger men, the League did recruit youths to its ranks as it expanded. Herbert Williams' experience in Tipton in 1909 provides evidence of this. He had already organised young boys between 12 and 16 years old to act as canvassers' scouts before he had heard of the League and when he became aware of it he formed them into one of its branches. It was not necessarily easy to deal with such a wide range of ages in inculcating Tory politics in the young. Williams drew attention to the difficulty when he observed in

⁶² Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 140.

1910 that ‘in some constituencies the members had to be younger than in others and consequently there had to be a watering down of politics’.⁶³ Even if electoral work was effective in the political motivation of young people the League’s leadership was to an extent middle-aged and this drew criticism. One member expressed the view that the ‘Executive should consist of young men and that politics should be kept well in sight by branches,’⁶⁴ The evidence suggests that this was so and that the League did ‘create [the] practical interest in political work and organisation among younger members’ that its formal statement of objects called for.⁶⁵ The League was chronically ambiguous about the appropriate ages its members and, on the evidence of its central bodies, did not have clearly defined lower and upper limits. However, it was less uncertain initially about deciding what to call itself.

When a group of individuals comes together to initiate a new political organisation, it ought to be a fundamental requirement that it must give a name to the organisation that succinctly conveys the purpose of that organisation. The name decided upon and the specific words selected may be taken to indicate how the organisation sees itself and wishes to be seen by others. Thus in choosing the name ‘the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League’, we see immediately its primary interests. It might reasonably have called itself ‘the Junior Unionist League’ or a neutral more abstract name but it did not. In choosing to include ‘imperial’ and ‘constitutional’ in its name, the League’s founders recognised and associated themselves in a supportive way with two of the most important contemporary issues: the desire for imperial unity and the need to retain Ireland within the polity of the United Kingdom and thus oppose Home Rule. The naming of the League thus had a certain fashionableness about it in directly acknowledging these salient contemporary political questions. The choice of ‘imperial’ was inspired by an affinity for Chamberlain and his policy of imperial preference. The League was strongly supportive of tariff reform even after the electoral defeat of the Tories in 1906 when the issue had been at the centre of the electoral campaign. A resolution

⁶³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Annual General Meeting, February 1910.

⁶⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1.

⁶⁵ *The Imp*, 1 (May 1925), 7.

was passed at the annual general meeting in 1929 calling on the party not to allow any parliamentary candidate to be selected who supported free trade.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding its managerial and financial issues and its uncertainties about its youthfulness and name, to what extent did the League sustain its ideology and achieve its objects? In April 1913, Imbert-Terry claimed that the League ‘had more than vindicated the objects of those who had founded it...’⁶⁷ but he did not elaborate or refer in detail to the objects. In assessing Imbert-Terry’s assertion, the formal statement of the League’s objects can be divided into two parts: first, the actual aims or ends to be achieved and secondly, the means by which those ends were to be reached. The latter comprised *inter alia* the setting up of branches and close relationships with the senior organisation and there is ample evidence, some of which has already been discussed, to assess the success of the League in those respects. The former aspect is more difficult to evaluate because there is a lack of information in its records relating to the League’s unionist, constitutionalist and imperial purpose. The minutes of the various meetings of the League are generally inward looking and deal largely with administrative matters, and only occasionally with political issues. For example, there were no political resolutions at the annual general meetings in 1909, 1910 and 1911. In 1912 and 1913, the general meetings were followed immediately by an annual conference but only the latter was, reportedly, extensively political in content. Furthermore, if coverage in *The Times* is accepted as a valid yardstick, the League received very little publicity in the press about its political activities⁶⁸ and it lacked its own means of regular publicity until May 1913, when it introduced an insert in *Our Flag*. However, the relatively rare occurrence of recorded political discussion may mean that, when it did occur and was recorded in the League’s official records, it was because the subject was of exceptional importance to members. As might be expected from an organisation closely bound up financially and organisationally with the Tory party, it did not dissent from official Unionist policy.

⁶⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/2/9 Annual Report 1929.

⁶⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/2 Annual General Meeting April 1913.

⁶⁸ There were only forty references to the League in a search of *The Times* database between 1 January 1905 and 31 December 1914.

At the first annual general meeting of the League in April 1908, a resolution was passed unanimously ‘supporting Balfour and his Unionist policy; in opposing [the Liberal government’s] ... education Bill which ignores the rights of parents; ... [and its] attempt to abandon the two Power Standard of Naval Strength’. It is worth noting that the principal speakers supporting the resolution were Sir R. Hermon-Hodge (1851-1937), Sir Harry Samuel (1853-1934) and Herbert Nield MP (1862-1932) none of whom could have been accurately described as younger members of the party and who convey a sense of blimpishness. Nield, a xenophobic die-hard Tory, and Samuel, a dedicated supporter of tariff reform, were members of the League Council at the time. Hermon-Hodge, who, like Samuel had lost his parliamentary seat in the 1906 general election, was a soldier and freemason whose ‘chief delights’ were horse-racing and hunting.⁶⁹ The resolution itself and the unanimity with which the meeting accepted the principal speakers’ arguments suggest an atmosphere of militarism. Mixed with militarism was xenophobia; Nield’s was consonant with the League’s defence of Britishness. For example, in January 1914 the Executive committee fashionably, and in the context of German spy fever, agreed unanimously, in an expression of nationalism, ‘that only British waiters should be employed’ at the League’s forthcoming annual dinner.⁷⁰ The caterers complied.

It was not just foreigners to whom the League showed its chauvinism; women were also expected to know their station. The annual general meeting in 1912 resolved ‘by a considerable majority’ that parliament should ‘oppose any measure extending the Parliamentary Franchise to women until it has been approved by a majority of the Electors of the United Kingdom’.⁷¹ This opposition was in accordance with Balfour’s policy but the League, or at least its Executive committee, were divided on the question, as were the party. H.G. Williams, a member of the committee, criticised Unionist MPs who were supportive of women’s votes declaring that they were ‘acting in a manner hostile to the best interests of the party and the Empire’.⁷² At the next committee meeting he proposed that enfranchising women would be ‘an outrage’. Several members opposed the resolution but it was passed by

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 12 October 1932 (Nield), 27 April 1934 (Samuel), 5 June 1937 (Hermon-Hodge).

⁷⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee January 1914.

⁷¹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Annual General Meeting February 1912.

⁷² Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee November 1912.

eight votes to five.⁷³ The importance of the issue to the League is evident in the fact that this was the only recorded occasion in the period before the First World War when a political issue was formally debated by the Executive committee and put to a vote.

Williams' references to 'party and empire' without mention of 'nation' or 'United Kingdom' are arguably typical expressions of the League's priorities. Loyalty to party was a *sine qua non* and unity of the United Kingdom and of the Empire its main purpose. These two unification campaigns combined at the meeting of the Executive committee in April 1912. Once more agreeing unanimously, it was resolved 'to invite all Branches to meet on Empire day...and pass a Resolution against the Home Rule Bill'. The resolutions were then to be sent to the prime minister.⁷⁴ The Executive committee was pleased with the branches' response; 'at least eighty had written promising to pass the resolution'.⁷⁵ The League continued to oppose Home Rule vigorously and deplored its constitutional impact. Branches were encouraged to obtain signatures from their members declaring that to pass the Bill into law without a referendum was unconstitutional and pledging that if the Home Rule Bill were enacted individual members would be 'justified in taking or supporting any action that may be effective to prevent it being put into operation'.⁷⁶

The League's emphasis on imperialism can also be seen in its choice of slogans from the earliest days of its existence that were intended to inspire young men. They were quotations from past and present Tory leaders and were included in an eight-page booklet launching the League's activities: 'The Commerce of a great Country like this, will flourish under the shadow of Empire' (Salisbury); 'What we are aiming at is the Consolidation of the British Empire' (Balfour); and most pithily, from Joseph Chamberlain, 'Learn to think imperially'.⁷⁷ Empire and trade, then, were themes given priority and illustrate the traditionalism of the League. Contemporaneous imperial activist groups such as the Tariff Reform League and the United Empire Trade League also made trade with the Empire their main concern. In

⁷³ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee December 1912.

⁷⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee April 1913.

⁷⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee May 1913

⁷⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee March 1914.

⁷⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/7.

the JIL, the Empire and its defence were evident: it recorded its ‘appreciation for the splendid manner in which the dominions are coming to the aid of the Mother Country by undertaking to share a portion of the Naval Defence of Empire’.⁷⁸ Again, the JIL was not alone among imperial activist groups in supporting integrated imperial defence: The Imperial Federation (Defence) League and the British Empire League are contemporaneous examples. And tradition, with its emotional companion, nostalgia, was present in the closing remarks of the last annual report before the Great War: ‘...the youth of the Unionist party possess in the fullest degree the same spirit of patriotism that was shown by their fathers in similar periods of national danger’.⁷⁹ Imperialism, militarism, tradition were the threads that wove the fabric of the League’s beliefs. It is no surprise, therefore, that early in 1914 the League approached Rudyard Kipling to write an ‘Ode to the League’. However, for unstated reasons Kipling declined the task.⁸⁰

The League’s meetings are not the only source in which its ideological priorities can be seen. It also produced leaflets and lantern slides. An educational sub-committee was set up in May 1911. It decided not to publish its own political literature nor to deal directly to the electorate. However, lists of books and leaflets (‘not confined to NU publications’) that dealt with the most important political topics were to be compiled and sent to branches. The topics comprised tariff reform, socialism, Home Rule, House of Lords reform, the Royal Navy, old age pensions and Conservative policy and record.⁸¹ It is not clear if these lists were ever compiled and promulgated because the Executive committee deferred consideration of the matter⁸² but they do identify the League’s political priorities, whether they were produced or not. The annual report for 1914 reveals the League’s consistent political purpose; first, in the use of lantern lectures that had been made available to branches on the British Empire, Home Rule, and tariff reform and imperial preference, as well as ‘The Life and Times of Lord Beaconsfield’; and secondly, in thanking a number of organisations to which it was indebted for literature and speakers: the Union Defence League, Primrose League, Tariff Reform League, London Municipal

⁷⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Annual conference April 1913.

⁷⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Annual report 1914.

⁸⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee May and June 1914.

⁸¹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Education committee June 1911.

⁸² Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/1 Executive committee July 1911.

Society, Imperial Maritime League, Anti-Socialist Union, Church Defence Committee, and 'other similar organisations'. The Junior Imperial League felt a particular affinity with the Primrose League when it asked permission to use its song book.⁸³ Imperialism was a feature of both organisations, a shared *raison d'être*. Comparison of the two Leagues helps any attempt to locate the JIL in the spectrum of imperial activist organisations.

Martin Pugh has argued that the Primrose League emerged partly as a result of 'the apprehension of Conservative leaders' about the potential of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, founded in 1867, to contest official party policy. The Primrose League was created by a group of Tory parliamentarians who saw the Tory leadership as lacking dynamism. It was 'a party within a party'⁸⁴ with the object of rectifying the 'the failure of the Conservative and Constitutional Associations to suit the popular taste or joining all the classes together for political objects'.⁸⁵ Anyone who was not an atheist or enemy of the British Empire was eligible to join and had to declare 'that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and the unity [and Imperial ascendancy]⁸⁶ of the British Empire...'. Apart from the reference to religion these were pledges very similar to those of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League. As one might expect some individuals were members of both organisations: Claude Hay MP and R. Belilios are examples.

The JIL was less formally hierarchical than the Primrose League. Although it frequently had leading members both centrally and in the Branches who were aristocratic, its subscription structure was not based on a system of payments whose escalating amounts bought a higher and higher place in the hierarchy. In JIL branches everybody paid the same subscriptions. The two organisations had systems of awards and honours mildly reflecting the contemporary practice of inventing tradition. Another similarity of the two bodies was that they worked closely with the NUCCA. The JIL, unlike the Primrose League, was heavily reliant financially on the central organisation of the Conservative party. Both had limited central budgets.

⁸³ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Central Council November 1913.

⁸⁴ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Primrose League Grand Council minutes, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 23.

The Primrose League had most of its resources in its habitations (branches) and this is probably also true of the JIL. The Primrose League's central funds were much greater than those of the JIL. In the late nineteenth century it had annual income of about £7000 whereas the JIL's central funds rarely exceeded £1000 in any year before 1914. There was a 'traditional preference of Conservatives for patronising local bodies'⁸⁷ rather than central organisations and this may explain the lack of central funds in the JIL.

Both organisations tended to use their central meetings more for the discussion of administrative matters than political issues, and they were also remarkably similar in their attempts to bring politics to those who might not otherwise take an interest in the subject. They both saw the need to educate their members in the branches through a process that avoided undiluted proselytising and thus saw the importance of social activities throughout the year in drawing members together. However, members of the Primrose League were 'reminded...that [social events] were only a means not the object of the exercise'.⁸⁸ In the JIL there was also a recurrent concern about the balance between social and political activities.

A major difference between the two leagues was the demography of their respective memberships. The Primrose League recruited widely. Its habitations admitted to membership 'non-Conservatives, women, non-voters and children'⁸⁹ whereas the JIL called upon new members to sign a document stating that they adhered to Unionist principles and was, with rare exceptions, exclusively male until 1918. It even excluded women as guests from at least one of its annual dinners. The absence of branch records before 1914 prevents us from establishing how widespread was the exclusion of women from JIL social functions. Nearly half the Primrose League's members were women which, because children were also members, means that they may have outnumbered men.⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that during the Edwardian period the Primrose League turned its attention more strongly towards youth as a means of counteracting the growth of socialism. The Primrose

⁸⁷ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁰ Pugh, *The Tories* (p. 49) shows that, for a sample of eleven habitations between 1886 and 1912, female members were 48.7% of total membership but does not make clear whether this includes children.

League collaborated with the Boy Scouts as part of the 'current fashion' for organising young people.⁹¹ There are very few details available of JIL membership before 1914 but what little evidence there is suggests a male membership between the ages of about eleven and thirty, although there are several examples of this upper age limit being exceeded. This is a major demographic difference from the Primrose League.

The Primrose League was imbued with the traditional characteristics of Conservatism: the monarchy, the church, the constitution and the Empire.⁹² The JIL had different emphases: the Empire and the constitution were central to its beliefs but the monarchy was less evident in its deliberations, at least in its central councils and committees. Perhaps respect for the Crown can be assumed to be present in an organisation that wishes to unify the Empire. The king was a powerful symbol of imperial unity. Religion receives no mention in the central records of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League. One cannot, however, conclude that it was an atheist organisation; perhaps religion did not form part of its corporate ethos and practices, or was simply taken for granted.

The Primrose League's imperialism was 'quite blatant'.⁹³ It attracted mass support particularly at times of heightened feelings of popular imperialism such as the twelve months from July 1899 that included the early part of the Boer War. Over 40,000 people joined the Primrose League during that period. A similar surge in membership of the JIL of almost 70,000 occurred between January 1910 and January 1912, a period that included a major constitutional crisis in Britain. The Primrose League was one of many imperialist organisations that sprang up in the Late Victorian and Edwardian periods but unlike others its imperialism was 'vague, amorphous and sentimental'.⁹⁴ It avoided political controversy. The same cannot be said of the Junior Imperial League with its unequivocal resolutions in support of imperial unity that were from time to time passed at its meetings. The JIL was a very much smaller organisation than the Primrose League; it had 70,000 members in January 1912 compared to the Primrose League's 650,000 that year. It was, however,

⁹¹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 41.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 88.

a growing organisation whereas the Primrose League was in decline. Furthermore the JIL was a more politically committed organisation than the Primrose League and its imperialism was masculine, specific, and not vague or simply sentimental. That is not to say, however, that it made a radical impact on political matters in the period between 1905 and 1918.

The League's impact

Despite its administrative and financial difficulties the League was not without impact on the political life of the time. At the outset it saw its branches, supported by the central organisation, as the key resource to be used for its activities. According to an early booklet published by the League, branch activities included lectures, debates, discussions and entertainment; holding public meetings in collaboration with senior Conservatives; canvassing; tracing people who had moved house; registration of those qualified to vote but not on the register; clerical work; and recruitment of both juniors and seniors.⁹⁵ Members in the branches were thus seen as material to be educated in political matters and as resources to be used in preparing for elections and in elections themselves. There is some evidence to show that there were processes for attempting to make an electoral impact but little or none by which to measure the strength of that impact. Thus, for example, members were mobilised at by-elections and thanked for their efforts but one cannot measure their numerical effect on the electorate. The executive committee described how the League had, 'as usual, taken a prominent part in Bye-Elections...[in 1913 with]... habitual enthusiasm'.⁹⁶ Before that, in 1912, John Gibson, the Unionist candidate for South Hackney wrote 'thanking the members of the League for their splendid work on his behalf'.⁹⁷ In the same year, Reginald Blair MP thanked the League for the 'excellent work performed by them on his behalf at the recent successful By-Election at Bow and Bromley'.⁹⁸ Finally, in 1914, R. Kerr Clark and Sir Matthew Wilson MP recorded their thanks for the League's 'valuable work' in the recent by-elections at Bethnal Green and Poplar.⁹⁹ Although by simply reading the minute books of the League one would be almost unaware that there were two general elections in 1910,

⁹⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/7.

⁹⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee February 1914.

⁹⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee June 1912.

⁹⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee December 1912.

⁹⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee March 1914.

the League did make an impact on the general election in December of that year. A letter from Arthur Balfour to Imbert-Terry was published in *The Times* expressing his 'best thanks for the admirable service [the members of the Junior Imperial League] have done throughout the contest'.¹⁰⁰ The further engagement of the League in electoral work from about 1912 can be seen in a reference in November that year to 'the effective and increasing assistance given by the Juniors in recent By Elections and Municipal contests'.¹⁰¹ Moves to help at by-elections began in 1908 when it was decided to write to constituency agents, whenever one occurred, offering help.¹⁰²

In the second main activity designed to make an impact, the political education of members, it is possible to gain a clearer, more numerical, picture of the level of activity and to see a strong working relationship between the centre and the branches of the League. The growth of socialism and its influence on young people was seen as a threat, and a motivating factor, therefore, in the League's educational activities was the recognition that socialist parties were effective in 'educational work with young people'. Courses of lectures were necessary 'to counter Socialistic parties endeavours to capture young men of this country'.¹⁰³ These remarks were aspirational but we can see the volume of practical activity in the report to the Council in November 1913 that 'since the last Council meeting [in May 1913] speakers had been supplied by [headquarters] to 265 meetings of Branches'.¹⁰⁴

The third way in which the League sought to make an impact was through its monthly publication, an insert in *Our Flag*. Its total circulation was 170,000 but the insert was limited to a small fraction of this; in October 1913, for example, only 14,200 copies had included the League's insert. This circulation figure should be seen in the context of the League's claim that its total membership at that time exceeded 100,000. If we assume that two or three people read each copy, not more than half the members would have received news of the League's activities in any one issue.

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, 12 January 1911.

¹⁰¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Central Council November 1912.

¹⁰² Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Council meeting October 1908

¹⁰³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/1 Annual General Meetings March 1908, February 1910.

¹⁰⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Council meeting November 1913.

There is no doubt that by 1913 the League had become a very active political organisation. However, on the evidence available, evidence which comes almost exclusively from the League's own management, one cannot be sure about its effectiveness. Imbert-Terry was perhaps exaggerating when in a self-congratulatory spirit when he declared that 'the vast membership...was doing...most powerful and good work throughout the length and breadth of the land'.¹⁰⁵ Steel-Maitland expressed his 'great faith in the League' in February 1914. With a general election in mind he was clear about the main role of the League and where its impact could be greatest: the 'duty of branches was [he said]...*first* to place their services at the disposal of the Unionist Agent for their constituencies' (emphasis added).¹⁰⁶ But the next general election did not happen until December 1918 by which time the effect of war had been to destroy the League almost entirely. However, the League recovered after the First World War and perhaps its most important achievement was to rebuild the foundations of what was to become, by 1939, the largest political youth organisation in Britain and, after the Second World War, the Young Conservatives.

The League's political activities were suspended during the war but individual members responded to the war in two ways: by serving in the forces and, for those who did not enlist, by assisting troops arriving in London on leave. For those League members not in the services there was an opportunity to assist those who were. The Overseas Forces Reception Committee was a collaboration between the League, the Victoria League, the Maple Leaf Club (an organisation supported financially by the Ontario government)¹⁰⁷ and the Peel House Club, with the purpose of greeting overseas troops from the Empire arriving in London at the rate of six hundred trains a week at ten railway stations and conducting them to their accommodation. By the end of the war the OFRC had dealt with over one million troops.¹⁰⁸

Members of the League reacted strongly and patriotically to the call to enlist. By February 1915 'at least 65 per cent of eligible members' had joined the army or

¹⁰⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Annual General Meeting April 1913.

¹⁰⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Central council meeting February 1914.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 8 April 1918.

¹⁰⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive committee May 1919.

navy. Nevertheless, the Executive committee believed that more could be done and decided to write to those branches that had not ‘adequately responded to the call of duty’.¹⁰⁹ Contact with branches was difficult, however, because in many cases all the office holders were absent in the forces. By October 1915, branches had so completely, willingly and patriotically responded ‘to the country’s call that it was difficult to find any eligible members who had not enlisted’.¹¹⁰ For example, at Mile End only six out of sixty-seven members had not enlisted¹¹⁰ and forty out of forty-eight secretaries of branches in the metropolis were on active service.¹¹¹ The relative strength of members’ commitment to the call to join the services can be seen in a comparison with the overall response by young men at the time: before conscription was introduced early in 1916, only about 25 per cent of all eligible men in the country had volunteered.¹¹² By 1918 the League had lost many valued members not only in its central committees but also in the branches. It was estimated that between sixty and seventy branch secretaries had been killed (out of a total of about 350 branches active at the outbreak of the war).¹¹³ All the League’s most senior officials, however, Imbert-Terry, Hallett, Cannell and Danford Thomas remained in post and their continuity enabled the League to begin its revival in 1919.

Conclusion

Any attempt to draw conclusions about the Junior Imperial League before the First World War must be treated with caution. This discussion of the League’s activities has relied heavily on the League’s own central sources. The League received little publicity in the press and as far as I am aware there are no surviving records of individual branch activities before 1918. Such sources would have provided a more balanced and comprehensive picture. The League, itself, was satisfied that it was an effective political force. Its annual report in March 1914 declared: ‘..the League has progressed with such astounding rapidity as to be now capable of playing a conspicuous part in the approaching battle for Unionist supremacy’.¹¹⁴ Certainly individual branches were active in the constituencies not simply when there was an election campaign in progress but also at other times in

¹⁰⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive committee February 1915.

¹¹⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive committee October 1915.

¹¹¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive committee February 1918.

¹¹² Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1999), p. 198.

¹¹³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive committee February 1918 and Council December 1919.

¹¹⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Annual report 1913.

strengthening electoral rolls. This work, as we have seen from the congratulatory messages from candidates, was useful. The regular supply of speakers to the branches is also indicative of a demand for political information that the central organisation was willing and able to meet. This activity ‘advanced the Unionist cause’ but it is difficult to quantify the extent to which this was true. However, the lantern slide lectures produced by the League emphasised the educational aspect of its purpose and it would be unreasonable to conclude that no younger members were made more aware of the political issues of the day from a Unionist perspective. The relentless opposition to Home Rule was a major part of the League’s programme and reflects its desire to ‘uphold constitutional principles’. It is in advancing the cause of Imperial Unity that the League appears least dynamic in meeting its objectives. Apart from two references to Canada, no colony or Dominion is mentioned in the central records. Empire Day was important but when it received especial focus it was in the context of Home Rule and the League’s imperial interest therefore seems Anglo-centric and unglobal. The League supported Tariff Reform and Imperial Preference through organising resolutions in the branches¹¹⁵ but there is no evidence that it sought similar support from overseas. Even when a letter was received from Montreal suggesting setting up League branches in order to accommodate members emigrating to Canada, consideration of the matter was deferred.¹¹⁶ The League’s motto was ‘For Empire’ but its commitment to imperialism seems largely passive and commonplace and its attempts to advance imperial unity relatively weak. The need for greater effort in that direction was recognised after the First World War when the League amended its objects to include the words ‘[to form] junior associations in each parliamentary division throughout the Empire’, replacing its former emphasis on metropolitan organisation.

Finally, whatever the ambitions of the League, it was severely limited in what it could achieve politically, even when it had emerged from its period of poor administration before 1910, because the supervising committees lacked resources. At the end of the period of rapid growth when it had reached, it claimed, over 100,000 members its central income could still be counted only in hundreds of pounds. Consequently one must assume that the branches were reliant largely on their own

¹¹⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee 1913.

¹¹⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Executive committee April 1914.

resources and enthusiasm and, if so, that there would have been a sense of weak direction from the centre. Multifarious local activities but no strong national message may explain why the League received so little publicity, publicity without which it would have found difficulty in trying to influence the political agenda.

Table 5. Analysis of early Junior Imperial League Branches¹¹⁷

Date formed	Name of branch	%Unionist vote 1900	%Unionist vote 1906	Category	Region	Pr. League membership
	C. Hackney					
4/07	Bath	57.3	43.2		Bristol	2440 (1880)
4/07	Bedford	53.4	45.1	A	Central	1696 (1900)
6/07	Dulwich	(76.4)	51.4	A	London	215 (est.) 1886-88)
10/07	N.Islington	65.5	45.5	B	London	40 (1886)
7/08	S. Exchange				[London]	
7/08	Central Finsbury	53.2	44.5	C	London	140 (1888)
	Coventry	55.7	45.5		W.Midland	
10/08	Brentwood				Outside London	
10/08	N.West Ham	61.5	42.7	B	Outside London	68 (1888)
11/08	Leytonstone				Outside London	
3/09	Peckham	59.3	37.6	C	London	115 (1888)
3/09	West Bromwich	47.7	43.8		W.Midland	209 (1888)
3/09	Leyton				Outside London	
3/09	S.Hackney	51.9	30.2	B	London	1993 (1891)
4/09	W.Bridgford					
/08	Reigate	62.5	49.1		Outside London	906 (1888)
/08	Stepney	61.8	57.3	C	London	114 (1888)
10/07?	N.Hackney	67.2	48.8	A	London	952 (1888)
10/07?	Dover	(64.5)	65.7	B	Outside London	2000 (1900)
10/07?	East Finchley	54.3	41.9	C	London	
10/07?	Hoxton (Shoreditch)	52.5	55.9	C	London	115 (1888)
10/07?	Brixton (Lambeth)	71.3	48.4	A	London	80 (1888)
10/07	S.St. Pancras	67.1	49.3	B	London	95 (1886)
10/07?	Haggerston (Shoreditch)	49.7	46.1	C	London	220 (1889)
Overall % at general election		51.1	43.6			

¹¹⁷ Data derived from Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, and from Pugh, *The Tories and the People*.

Chapter 3. The Junior Imperial League 1918-1939: its governance and membership

The revival and growth of the Junior Imperial League in the years after the First World War were positively influenced by the expansion of the British electorate and the return of party politics after the break-up of the Lloyd George coalition in 1922. The League's largely aristocratic and upper-middle class leadership recognised the necessity of attracting young men and, for the first time in substantial numbers, women, drawn from an eclectic mix of social classes, who could contribute to the future electoral success of the Conservative party. The Junior Imperial League, it will be argued, recruited young people of the new, post-war, middle class, as well as from the working class.

The mixing of social classes in the League brought accusations of snobbery in some of its branches, especially in its social activities, but the League provided opportunities for young lower-middle class men and women to acquire political skills, to advance through the League's hierarchy and, in some cases, to become members of parliament.

The social and political circumstances of Britain were a significant element in the growth of the League's membership in the 1920s and in its subsequent decline in the following decade when the increasing attractions of the wireless and the cinema drew League members away from its own social activities. Furthermore, the 1930s were years of national government dominated by the Conservatives in which there were only two general elections compared with five between 1918 and 1929; it was thus a time in which political campaigning was, it will be suggested, less interesting to young people. Nonetheless the League was a much larger and more successful organisation than its counterparts in the Labour and Liberal parties. It was well managed by an older generation in the Tory party and became increasingly integrated at all levels into the organisational structure of the party.

The governance of the League

The leadership of the League throughout its existence is notable for its stability and continuity. These attributes were quite rare in imperial activist groups because many of them, such as the IFL, ISAA, ERDC and the Empire Crusade, did not survive long enough to display them. When groups did last for several decades, however, individuals sometimes showed remarkable long-term dedication. The most notable examples are the League of the Empire, whose founder Mrs Ord Marshall was its honorary secretary from 1901 until her death in 1931, the EPA, in which Howard d'Egville was a leading figure for almost fifty years, and the Round Table whose founders were a dominant force from 1909 until the Second World War.

In the JIL between 1906 and 1945, none of the key posts of president, chairman, secretary, treasurer and organising secretary was occupied by more than five individuals (see Appendix 1). These posts, with the exception of the organising secretary, were part-time and honorary and there was never a large central department of full-time officials available to plan, direct and control the daily activities of the League. However, the leadership was supported by a three corporate assemblies: the Central Body, the Central Council and the Executive Committee, to which several sub-committees reported, notably a finance committee and a publicity committee. Examining the membership and activities of these organisations helps to explain the governance and leadership of the League.

The Central Body consisted of an unlimited number of life members, patrons, and subscribers of the League who, in effect, bought membership of it by paying, respectively, a single donation of £25, and an annual subscription of £10.10s or £1.10s. These were substantial sums, even allowing for inflation, when compared, for example, with the annual subscription of 2s 6d made by a Knight of the Primrose League, in the 1880s.¹ In addition to a payment, each individual had to sign a declaration that they supported the principles of the League and have their membership approved by the Central Council. The League's records do not reveal the size of the Central Body but it was not seen by its members to be sufficiently large; a resolution passed unanimously in 1924 called on its membership to be

¹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 25.

increased.² It met annually and it seems to have been primarily a means of attracting funds from wealthy individuals sympathetic to Conservative politics. Its only apparent power was to elect, from its membership, twelve people to serve on the Central Council and six on the Executive Committee of the League. All members of the Central Body were entitled to attend the League's annual general meeting.

In addition to the officers of the League, the Central Council drew its membership from the officers of each of its seventeen federations and two representatives from each divisional council. It was closely allied to the main party by including a number of Conservative Party officials such as its chief whip, its chairman and vice-chairmen, chief organisation officer and chief publicity officer. Representatives from the Provincial Agents' Association were also members of the Council. It is difficult to assess how much influence these officials actually had on the Central Council because records of the content of its meetings are brief and there are no attendance lists. A remark made at one of its meetings, reminding members that the chief whip was entitled to attend, suggests that their lack of awareness that that was the case means that their attendance was sparse. Nevertheless the fact that they had been given such an entitlement shows, at least, that the League wanted a close relationship with the most senior officials of the Conservative party hierarchy even to the extent of involving them directly in the governance of its affairs. Certainly there must have been close informal links. For example, in 1927, Lord Stanley was appointed a deputy chairman of the party at the same time as holding the chairmanship of the League. Other examples are Lord Eustace Percy, who was simultaneously a vice-president of the League and president of the Board of Education in Baldwin's cabinet in the nineteen-twenties, and Lord Dunglass who was parliamentary private secretary to Neville Chamberlain from 1937 to 1940 whilst he was chairman of the League. These close connections gave both formal and informal opportunities to advance to League's interests as exemplified by a hostile remark by J.C.C. Davidson, the party chairman, that Stanley used his dual appointments to place 'the League in a favoured position'.³

² Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/3 Central Body May 1924.

³ J. C. C. Davidson, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J. C. C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-37*, ed. by Robert Rhodes James (London, 1969), p. 273.

Management of the League's business was delegated by the Council, under its strategic direction, to an Executive Committee. The structure of the committee was very similar to that of the Council. It drew its members from the same sources: the party, the officers of the League, the Central Body and the federations and divisions. To a certain extent there was, therefore, duplication of effort between the two bodies, the main differences being that the Council met only twice a year whereas the Executive Committee met monthly.

It was not only in the formal structure of its council and committees that the League was closely connected to the Conservative party. It had representatives on the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. Initially, these were confined to senior members of the League: its chairman, secretary, three others selected by League headquarters, and the chairman of each federation. It was not until 1938 that the League became fully integrated organisationally into the main party. The impetus for this change came, it seems, from the Conservative party whose chairman, Douglas Hacking, had set up a committee in March 1937 under Malcolm Fraser to recommend ways in which the League could be brought into closer cooperation with the party. The result was that at the annual conference of the National Union later that year a resolution, passed unanimously, and proposed by two members of the League asked that:

The Junior Imperial League should be taken by the Party into full partnership and its position should be of the same general character as is the case with the separate men's and women's organisations.⁴

It meant much greater representation of the League in the National Union's central council and also closer involvement in the affairs of local constituency organisations as well as Conservative party area councils. The League also set up a permanent network of area organisers to work closely with constituency agents. League federations were also given greater freedom to manage their financial resources which could now be devoted entirely to local activities.

These changes finally placed young Tories on an equal footing with the men's and women's organisations within the party structure and provided an

⁴ *Torchbearer*, 2 (October 1938), 3.

opportunity to participate much more effectively in the business of the Conservative party. Young men and women interested in Tory politics had finally been formally and properly recognised by the party and had completely dispelled the suggestion made, when they were founded over thirty years earlier, that it was an impertinence for a young man to become involved in politics. The possibility of a young woman doing so was even less acceptable to older people but nevertheless they were, to a limited extent, politically active. The reforms of 1938 announced the consummation of the efforts of Tory youth to be taken seriously by the senior organisation.

In spite of this one can see from the names of the individuals who headed the organisation (see Appendix 1) that the League was led by aristocrats who, whilst they were not old men, cannot be accurately described as youths or even within the League's upper age limit of thirty. In the inter-war years the posts of president and chairman were always held by individuals who were at least in early middle age. The posts of secretary, treasurer and organising secretary were usually held by older, middle class, men. One might conclude that the central organisation of the League represented older men from the upper reaches of society providing leadership for younger men of a much wider range of classes in the federations, divisions and branches. Even in these parts of the organisation, in many cases the president of a federation would be an older person, sometimes a junior member of the aristocracy, sometimes the wife of a member of parliament. Arguably, there is a loose positive correlation between age and position in the class structure and seniority of post held in the League.

It has been suggested that '[o]ne function of youth movements...was to smooth the way for upper-working class and lower-middle class assimilation into the urban-industrial order of British society.'⁵ Whilst this description does not fit exactly the League, it has some relevance to it. The League might be characterised as older, upper-class, people leading young people of all classes in the 'right' political direction in a controlled fashion, so that by the end of the 1930s they agreed to give them more effective involvement in the governance of party affairs.

⁵ J. O. Springhall, *Youth Empire and Society* (London, 1977), p. 121.

The growth and decline of League membership

The impact of the First World War on the active membership of the League was extremely severe. It fell from about one hundred thousand in three hundred branches to perhaps only a couple of thousand in only six active branches. There was, therefore, no rapid, straightforward, resumption of the activities of the Junior Imperial League immediately after the end of the First World War. The high proportion of members who joined the military, their slow demobilisation after the war, and the deaths in the fighting of many League officials combined to prevent it. The League had suspended its operations during the war; a substantial proportion of its members, especially those likely to be leading the activities of branches, were of military age and so were deployed in the armed forces. By February 1915 'in many Branches not a single office bearer was left'⁶ and in October it was 'difficult to find any eligible member of the League who had not enlisted.'⁷ A year later, even before the introduction of conscription, '75 per cent of Junior Imperialists who are eligible [had] joined the colours'⁸ and a survey of the forty-eight metropolitan branches early in 1918 revealed that in forty of them the secretary was on active service and a further three were 'abroad on Government work'.⁹ At the end of the fighting, in November 1918, many members, not only in the branches but also in the League's central committees, had lost their lives in the war. It was 'estimated that more than ten thousand members died in their country's service'¹⁰ out of a membership approaching one hundred thousand of which only a proportion (perhaps about two-thirds) were of military age.¹¹ Between sixty and seventy branch secretaries had been killed out of a total of 353 branches active in August 1914.¹² However, all the League's pre-war senior central officials, the Chairman, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer and Organising Secretary, remained in post throughout the war and this continuity enabled the League more readily to attempt its revival.

⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee February 1915.

⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee October 1915.

⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee March 1916.

⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee February 1918.

¹⁰ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 4.

¹¹ This suggests that about 16% of members died in the war. This compares with 11.8% of all personnel mobilised in Britain and Ireland (Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 299).

¹² Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee February 1918 and Council December 1919. In *The Imp*, 1 (May 1925), p. 7, Herbert Williams MP, a Vice-Chairman of the League, wrote that '95 [secretaries] had made the great sacrifice'.

In March 1918 the chairman, Henry Imbert-Terry, wrote to the branches emphasising the importance of the new Representation of the People Act which enfranchised all men aged twenty-one or over, and women over thirty who were ratepayers or married to a ratepayer. The Act greatly increased the size of electorate from 28 per cent to about three-quarters of the adult population.¹³ Even though the official age range for membership of the League of fourteen to twenty-five years might suggest that only a minority of its male members were enfranchised, and very few women, the Executive Committee recognised the electoral importance of women by passing unanimously a resolution stating that ‘it is essential that the co-operation of women in the working of the League should be welcomed and secured’.¹⁴ In addition a member of the Executive Committee was sent, in the Spring of 1918, on a tour of the provincial Divisions of the League to convene meetings that would attempt to assess and revive interest in the League but the meetings were poorly attended and ‘were used for recruiting purposes for the navy and the army’.¹⁵ Clearly, at that time, the League’s members were concerned with military rather than political matters, a view reinforced by Imbert-Terry’s decision not to send his proposed letter to the branches because to call for ‘vigorous political action [by the League]’ at the time of the German Spring offensive would have been inappropriate and ‘mistaken policy’.¹⁶ Furthermore members of the League who were not in the armed services were engaged in the activities of the Overseas Forces Reception Committee who met, between 1916 and 1918, three quarters of a million Dominion troops arriving at railway stations in London and guided them to their accommodation.¹⁷ These duties continued until well into 1919 and diverted attention away from the League’s affairs.¹⁸

The League’s branches appear to have had no involvement in the general election in December 1918. For many branches the loss of their officials killed in the war exacerbated the problems of resuming activities and meant that they lacked the organisation and leadership to do so. The main party also had its organisational

¹³ Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*.

¹⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee February 1918.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee November 1918.

¹⁷ The OFRC was formed from members of the Junior Imperial League, the Victoria League, Maple Leaf Club and Pearl House Club, CPA CCO506/1/7.

¹⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee November 1918.

problems. The election campaign began officially on the day after Armistice Day and, with polling day set for 14 December, there was little time for well-organised campaigning by parties that had suspended normal political rivalry during the war. The way in which the ‘coupon’ that officially endorsed coalition candidates was issued sometimes caused confusion and resentment. For example, in Liverpool, a Tory official claimed that interference by Central Office had cost the party ten seats in the region.¹⁹ Furthermore, *The Times* described the election as ‘the quietest...in modern times...free from the old kind of party horseplay’²⁰ during which the political parties encountered a puzzled and apathetic public. In these circumstances it is unlikely that the League would have been an effective campaigning resource even if it had been as organised to be so as it was to become in later years. Progress towards that goal required more time.

By the early summer of 1919, the results of a survey of all 353 branches concluded that although there was ‘eagerness to carry on the work of the League’²¹ it was too early to do so because of the slow rate of demobilisation of young men in the services some of whom were members of the League. The Central Council was informed in December 1919, at its first meeting since April 1914, that only fifty branches were fully functional. Another hundred were ready to resume activities but eighty-one branches still had no secretariat.²² By the beginning of the nineteen-thirties this situation had been transformed. In its Annual Report for 1930 the League boasted ‘some 2000 branches’.²³

There were two sources for the expansion in the number of branches: the creation of new ones where none had previously existed, and the affiliation of established junior organisations whose political principles coincided with those of the League. For example, in 1921 the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Junior Unionist Associations decided to affiliate its fifty branches. Nevertheless growth in the early nineteen-twenties was affected by the party political neutrality created by the coalition government that had been elected in December 1918. In many

¹⁹ John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (New Haven and London, 1992), p. 321.

²⁰ *The Times*, 13 December 1918.

²¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee May 1919.

²² Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Central Council December 1919.

²³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/10 AGM May 1931.

constituencies the senior Unionist Association was completely paralysed ‘especially in constituencies represented by Coalition Liberals’ and this had meant that local agents delayed the setting up of junior associations.²⁴ However, the League’s chairman, Imbert-Terry, reported an improved picture in April 1922:

The continuation of the Coalition and the uncertainty inseparable from such a state of political affairs did much [in 1921] to prevent the growth of the League; but now in all respects the League is gradually surmounting the ravages of the War, and resuming something of the former strength and numbers. Over two-hundred organisations are affiliated to the League, and ‘applications for the formation of new Branches are being daily received [by the Executive Committee]’.²⁵

Six months later the uncertainty was removed. The Lloyd George administration collapsed when Tory backbenchers voted in October 1922 to withdraw support for it and thus allow normal party politics to resume causing ‘the instant revival of interest in the work of the League’.²⁶ This revival coupled with the expansion of the electorate in 1918, and again in 1928, created conditions conducive to the greater involvement of young people in party politics. Table 6 shows the growth of the branches and membership claimed by the Junior Imperial League between 1909 and 1929.

²⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/2 Central Council Meeting February 1921.

²⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/2 Annual Report for 1922.

²⁶ Bodn. CPA 506/1/3 Central Council February 1923.

Table 6. Growth in Junior Imperial League Branches and Membership, 1909-29

Date	Branches	Members	Source	Notes
1909 Jan	30	3,000	<i>Torchbearer</i> 1939	
1909 Dec	180	45,000	“	
1910				
1911	280	70,000	“	
1912 Dec	330	100,000		
1913				
1914 Jan	300		<i>The Imp</i> March 1928	
1918	6			
1919 Jan	60		<i>The Imp</i> March 1928	
1920 Jan	114		“	See Note 1.
1921 Jan	166		“	
1922 Jan	200		“	
1923 Jan	310		“	
1924 Jan	430		“	
1925 Jan	500		“	
1926 Jan	787		“	
1927 Jan	1015		“	
1928 Jan	1240		“	
1929 Mar	1690	250,000	Annual Report 1928/29. Speech by Lord Plymouth, League President, 2 Feb 1929	

Note 1. The figures for the number of branches are, with minor discrepancies, corroborated by Annual Reports and Minutes of Council and Executive Committee meetings.

Although the League regularly, and proudly, publicised its growth in terms of the number of its branches, detailed figures of the number of members in individual branches and in total were rarely stated. The membership figures shown in Table 6 seem to be rounded and therefore approximations. If we nevertheless accept them as reasonably accurate then it is clear that average branch membership fell from about 250 before the First World War, to about 150 in 1929. Occasionally the total

numbers of members in branches are referred to in the League's extant records. In a recruitment campaign in 1935, for example, an internal report claimed that sixty-one new branches were formed with a total membership of 'almost 13,000' suggesting an average membership of about 200 per branch.²⁷

Total membership of the League declined during the nineteen-thirties from a peak of 250,000 in 1929, which figure, incidentally, exceeded the total individual membership of the Labour Party at that time of 229,000.²⁸ The League's membership in 1939 was estimated to be 'approximately 100,000'.²⁹ This figure may be an over-estimate. In a survey³⁰ of 221 branches in 156 constituencies in England and Wales in 1939, the average number of League members in each constituency was approximately a hundred. If we extrapolate these figures to estimate the total membership in all 520 constituencies in England and Wales, we arrive at an estimated total membership of only about 52,000. The true figure probably lies somewhere between fifty and one hundred thousand but if we accept the upper estimate, there was a fall of sixty per cent from the total membership announced by Lord Plymouth, the League's president, ten years earlier. Whatever the rate of decline in membership may have been in the nineteen-thirties, an internal analysis of membership by region compiled in December 1934 confirms a downward trend (See Table 7, below).

²⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/8

²⁸ Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, p. 143.

²⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/4/9 Draft of Palmer Report, 1943.

³⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO506/4/12 The Junior Imperial League Membership 1939.

Table 7. Approximate Membership 1934³¹

Geographical area	Number of members	Percentage of total
London	6734	5.7 ³²
Northern	4221	3.6
Lancashire and Cheshire	19038	16.0
Yorkshire	12104	10.2
East Midlands	9493	8.0
West Midlands	13650	11.5
Eastern	11542	9.7
Essex	6066	5.1
Middlesex	5522	4.6
Kent	4562	3.8
Surrey	3429	2.9
Sussex	2145	1.8
Wessex	7288	6.1
Cornwall	2143	1.8
Devon	2677	2.3
Somerset	4270	3.6
Wales	3854	3.2
Total	118868	100.0

The loss of membership was not due simply to falling numbers in functioning branches. Some branches ceased to operate at all. An internal report in May 1937 referred to thirteen branches as ‘recently notified defunct’. However, the problem of failing branches was not ignored by League Headquarters; in 1936 twenty-two branches were revived, re-formed or re-organised and in the first five months of 1937, thirty-one.³³ There were also several national recruitment campaigns during the nineteen-thirties. One can interpret these campaigns as reflecting anxiety or disappointment that the League was not sustaining sufficiently the interest of young

³¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/8 Membership and Recruiting Campaigns 1934, 1935, 1939.

³² This percentage contrasts with the early years of the League when a ‘large proportion of Branches...[were] in the immediate vicinity of London...’. CPA CCO506/1/7 Annual Report February 1909.

³³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/8.

people in politics. Certainly, in February 1939, Lord Dunglass (later, as Sir Alec Douglas-Home, prime minister) the League's chairman, in a speech announcing a national three-year drive for new members, declared that

The League is the largest youth political organisation in the country...but it still has a very much lower membership than it should have. Our objective must be greatly increased membership.³⁴

This objective was never met. 1939 was the last year in which the League was active. A few months after Dunglass had spoken, national circumstances called for recruitment of a different kind and of much greater importance. But what were the causes of the decline in the membership of the League?

Throughout the existence of the League a constant theme was the need to balance the amount of social and political activity in the branches. The reasons for the expansion, and subsequent decline, of the League lie, therefore, in members' varying interest in these two types of activity. A more detailed discussion of the League's activities is contained in Chapter 4. However, a limited analysis of branch activities shows an increase in political activity and a corresponding relative decline in social events. In January 1927, 52% of activities were political or semi-political³⁵ rising to 57% by July 1930 and 61% in July 1937.³⁶ A more detailed analysis over a longer continuous period of time is necessary in order to confirm any trend towards greater concentration on political issues but it is possible to suggest some reasons why such a trend occurred.

The greater interest in political matters may have resulted from a loss of members who favoured the most popular social activities: sports, trips and outings, dramatics and dances. Alternative forms of entertainment grew rapidly from the late nineteen-twenties. The arrival of 'talkies' in 1929 caused a decline in the performance of live music³⁷ and also drew between eighteen and nineteen million people to the cinema each week throughout the thirties. Broadcasting also

³⁴ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 1.

³⁵ *The Imp*, 2 (February 1927), 6.

³⁶ Derived from analyses of branch reports in *The Imp* and *Torchbearer*.

³⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 399.

increasingly provided a way in which to spend leisure time. Radio licences increased from almost two million in 1926 to three million in 1930, to twice that by 1934 and almost to 'saturation coverage' by 1939. By then, 'to have missed a popular programme became a social disability'.³⁸ This pull towards other forms of social activity than meeting at the local branch of the League was accompanied by a push towards more political activity. Ordinary members wrote to the League's journal urging members to take more interest in political issues and the party agent in Shrewsbury, J.H. Montgomery, argued that he would 'rather have a...branch of 30 young men and women sincerely studying and training for the future than 300 who join for the social side...and do little to support [the party]'.³⁹ A more formal attempt to strengthen the standing of politically serious members was expressed in a resolution passed at the annual conference in 1934 calling for a full membership to be granted 'only [to] such persons who are willing to undertake practical political work in the cause of Conservatism'⁴⁰ but the idea of two categories of membership was rejected by the Executive Committee albeit that they were 'desirous of extending the political activities of the League'. One can interpret these calls for a stronger political aura in the League either as a need to overcome political apathy or, conversely, as a message reinforcing growing political interest. Nevertheless political messages and social circumstances may well have combined to make social members feel less welcome in the branches and drive them towards readily available alternative means of satisfying their social needs thus leaving behind a stronger proportion of political membership.

The peak membership of 250,000 that the League claimed in the early nineteen-thirties should be seen in the context of approximately six million people who were aged between fifteen and twenty-five and so it is quite likely that the membership was exaggerated by League officials in order to try to over-emphasise the popularity and power of the League. In any case the figures may have been compiled by simply adding to existing records new branches without taking into account moribund and defunct branches and any loss of membership from active branches. If, however, we accept the membership figure of 250,000 it would seem

³⁸ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory, Britain 1900-1990* (London, 1996), pp. 116-7.

³⁹ *Torchbearer*, 3 (February 1939), 14.

⁴⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/4 Executive Committee Meeting October 1934.

that it was not only unsurpassed in the years leading up to the Second World War but also, after 1945, by the League's successor organisation, the Young Conservatives, whose membership peaked in 1949 at only 157,000.⁴¹ There was therefore perhaps a unique confluence of social and political circumstances in the nineteen-twenties that caused the League's rapid growth in membership to its highest level ever.

The Junior Imperial League was not the first organisation to be founded with the purpose of organising Tory youth. For example, the Lancashire and Cheshire Young Conservatives, with about sixty branches, already existed before the League was founded. Other, smaller, organisations such as the Isle of Thanet Young Conservatives, the Leicestershire Young Conservatives, the Epsom Junior Constitutional Club and the Young Conservatives Union in London were also active and illustrate the diversity of young Tory organisations. The Junior Imperial League leadership encouraged these organisations to affiliate and indeed sought, unsuccessfully, a leading role in comprehensively integrating them into a single organisation. Many did affiliate to the League and this provided a rapid means of growth for the League in the nineteen-twenties. The League's claims about its growth in the number of its branches therefore give an exaggerated picture of the increase in its membership, if such increases are meant to indicate that young people were being *newly* recruited to the pursuit of Tory principles. Affiliating branches were not young Tories joining the party for the first time, but merely existing groups associating themselves with the League. Nevertheless this affiliation process was responsible for the rapid growth of the League and seems to have been more strongly manifest in the nineteen-twenties, during which time those who wished to affiliate had done so, than later when the emphasis was much more on direct campaigns for the recruitment of truly fresh blood.

Nor was the Junior Imperial League the only organisation for young people of a political party. The Liberal and the Labour parties also organised youth for political purposes. The National League of Young Liberals was founded in 1903 and by 1928 had 500 branches with 'a paying membership of 25,000', a figure which understated the total membership, according to its national secretary, because 'many

⁴¹ Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, p. 133.

of our members are too poor to pay any subscription'. Its members, almost half of whom were women, engaged in canvassing and the distribution of literature under the supervision of the local constituency agent and were 'an effective rival to the...Junior Imps'.⁴² They worked closely with local officials and were also capable of expressing themselves forcefully at their annual conferences. In 1932, for example, they resolved to support free trade and called on Liberal ministers to resign from the National Government. This did not mean, though, that they had no imperial feelings. Three years earlier, in 1929, they criticised their rival Tory league for 'abrogat[ing] to itself the name of Junior Imperial League' and repudiated 'the impertinent assumption that the Tory Party...has a monopoly of Imperial sentiment'. This limited evidence suggests that Liberal youth and the senior organisation had, at worst, a *modus vivendi*, but the same cannot be said of Labour youth and its senior organisation.

The Young Labour League was formed in 1920 from the amalgamation of a few local party youth sections and by 1924 had 24 branches.⁴³ By the beginning of the nineteen-thirties it was still narrowly based, operating effectively in few constituencies.⁴⁴ Partly this was due to lack of financial resources but, more crucially, the National Executive Council was wary of organising youth in the Labour party because it believed that it would be too radical and undisciplined. It therefore placed tight restrictions on its activities by emphasising social and instructional activities at the expense of political matters. The NEC regarded its young people as politically naïve and unqualified to express views that were contrary to those of the party leadership and so it did not allow members of the Young Labour League to discuss political issues freely, to influence local committees or participate actively at Labour party annual conferences. Its main use, the NEC believed, was as an electoral resource. The resultant tension between the Labour party and its youth organisation was chronic and intrinsic and eventually led to the collapse of the latter in 1939. According to Layton-Henry

⁴² *The Times*, 1 April 1928.

⁴³ Zig Layton-Henry, 'Labour's Lost Youth', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (July 1976), 275-308 (p. 275).

⁴⁴ James K. Pollock Jr., 'British Party Organisation', *Political Science Quarterly*, 45 (June 1930), 161-180 (p. 175).

[The] fundamental conflict is the clash between the instrumental role the party wishes the young movement to fulfil and the dominance of expressive politics in the youth movement...Loyalty to socialism is valued [by Labour youth] above loyalty to the Labour party.⁴⁵

One can contrast this with the attitude of members of the Junior Imperial League. In that organisation young people frequently and, seemingly wholeheartedly, expressed their support for the party's leadership. This did not mean that they suppressed their ideological feelings; members from time to time contested the policies of their party, especially in imperial matters. However, arguably they demonstrated the antithesis of the attitude of young socialists and generally put loyalty to the party above ideology. Perhaps they were able to do so more readily because their pragmatic ideology was somewhat less rigid than that of their Labour counterparts. A second significant difference was the attitude of senior Conservatives to the Junior Imperial League. It would be quite wrong to argue that there were never tensions between seniors and juniors, but the League was increasingly integrated into the main party. For example, it took part in the Conservative annual conference and had representatives on the National Union of Conservative Associations. All this did not necessarily mean that their opinions were taken into account by the party leadership any more than was the case in the Labour party. It does, however, suggest that the Tories knew how to manage their juniors more effectively and did so by educating them in political matters, allowing them to participate and to express their political ideas. This gave the members of the League feelings of involvement and freedom of expression, in contrast to the repression felt by members of the League of Labour Youth. The autocratic denial of an activity can become a spur to taking action that challenges and subverts a perceived tyrant, especially if it is youth that has been denied by an older generation. The Tories, with their participative attitude to youth, seems to have understood this. The Labour party did not and 'never had a satisfactory relationship with the young'.⁴⁶

An important cause of the post-war expansion of the League was the many young women who took up the opportunity to become members. Until David Jarvis

⁴⁵ Layton-Henry, 'Labour's Lost Youth', p. 305.

⁴⁶ Philip Abrams and Alan Little, 'The Young Activist in British Politics', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 16 (December 1965), 315-333 (p. 320).

examined it in the 1990s, “[t]he nature of the Conservative appeal to women in the crucial decade of the 1920s [had]...attracted little historical attention.”⁴⁷ The Junior Imperial League was an important part of this appeal but even Jarvis does not include it in his analysis and almost nothing has been written about it by historians. The senior party, responding to the vital need to attract women voters in 1918, identified four characteristic types of potential Tory female voter: ‘the responsible citizen, the anti-socialist, the caring capitalist, and the imperialist.’⁴⁸ As will be seen in the discussion in Chapter 4, these types fit well with the activities and ideology of the young women who joined the Junior Imperial League, even though they were unable to vote until ten years later, in 1928. Recruitment into the ranks of the main party and of the League was not part of a self-consciously feminist movement, which would have had socialist connotations, but part of a trend in the greater involvement of women in party politics. However, even though electorally emancipated by 1928, women in the League could still convey an air of female political inferiority as an article in *The Imp*, written by a woman and headed How Girls Can Help, perhaps shows.⁴⁹

There were almost no female members of the League before the First World War but from 1919 they were freely admitted to membership and the pent-up need to be part of a junior political organisation meant that numbers grew rapidly. According to H.I.P. Hallett, the Hon. Secretary of the League, ‘[In 1919] women began to flock into the League in large numbers’⁵⁰ and were ‘in large measure’⁵¹ responsible for the revival and expansion of the League immediately after the war. During the nineteen-twenties they became predominant in many branches and this caused concern that the balance between the two genders needed redressing. At the Annual Meeting of the League in 1927 a resolution was passed unanimously calling for ‘immediate steps to be taken to...increase the membership of the Men’s Sections of those branches where there is a preponderance of active women members’.⁵² The

⁴⁷ David Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5 (1994), 129-152 (p. 129).

⁴⁸ Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London;1987), quoted in Jarvis, ‘Mrs Maggs and Betty’, p. 134.

⁴⁹ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 8.

⁵⁰ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 11.

⁵¹ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 4.

⁵² *The Imp*, 3 (June 1927), 8.

resolution also suggested that young men were more apathetic and less involved in the branches' activities than were women members. Admission of women to membership of the League was the cause 'in large measure...not only the growth of the reviving League from 6 to 60 branches by January 1919, but also the subsequent expansion over the country' by 1928.⁵³ Miss C.A.Payne, Vice-Chairman of the East Midlands Federation of the League, wrote that year that the influx of women and girls meant that:

In most branches...the positions of officers are filled by an equal number of boys and girls, the same applying to the Committee. The actual membership of the branch varies...from district to district, although my experience has been that in most cases we girls have the majority...⁵⁴

In the nineteen-twenties, therefore, women members, and the affiliation of established branches, produced an unusually rapid and unsustainable rate of growth in membership.

Another factor which may have made the nineteen-twenties an unusually fertile period for the political activities of youth was the calling of elections. The various activities of the League will be discussed in more detail later but one of its most important and enthusiastically undertaken ones was assisting parliamentary candidates at general elections and by-elections. Members of the League were often congratulated by constituency agents and candidates on their efforts at election time. The publicity given to politics at that time could act as an effective means of attracting new members and stimulating the political activities of existing ones. As the League began to revive after 1919 its activity was stunted by the anaemia of party politics in a period of coalition government. However, the four general elections fought in the nineteen-twenties were three-cornered fights between the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties and with fewer and fewer seats left uncontested. Furthermore, the election of 1929 enabled young women to vote for the first time. These elements combined to create an atmosphere in which political awareness and activity among the young could increase and draw them into membership of the League. Indeed in February 1929, with a general election known

⁵³ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 4.

⁵⁴ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 8.

to be imminent, Lord Castlereagh, prospective candidate for Darlington, in a speech at a rally in Durham, claimed that the membership of the League in Darlington had grown in the last year from about 130 to 600. That increase, he said, 'was typical of the whole country',⁵⁵ a statement that we should perhaps not take too literally in its arithmetical implications but rather as a perception of widespread rapid growth in membership. However, a more objective report in *The Times* exemplifies the argument about the combination of the League, women and elections: 'At Darlington...[w]ith the enthusiastic aid of the Junior Imperial League [Lord Castlereagh] has captured the interest and allegiance of large numbers of new women voters'.⁵⁶

The nineteen-thirties were very different in terms of levels of activity at general elections. There were only two in the decade and neither was a close-run contest. By-elections and local elections still provided opportunities for campaigning but the long period of national government that began in 1931, with its large Conservative majority, created fewer opportunities for the members of the League to engage nationally in enthusiastic partisan electoral politics. In its annual report in May 1937, for example, the League referred to 'a year of diminishing political activity', presumably referring to electoral matters.⁵⁷ The situation was unlike that of the preceding decade and it is likely that the relative electoral quiescence of the period was reflected in declining League membership.

It does not seem to be by chance that in the inter-war years the growth of the League occurred in the years of stronger partisan politics, between 1922 and 1931, and that its stagnation and decline happened in years of coalition and national government in 1919 to 1922 and again from 1931. This is not to argue that the League was simply an electoral machine. Its range of political activities was wide and there is no single cause of the pattern of the recruitment or loss of members. However, perhaps its work during election campaigns was its most recurrently conspicuous and thus brought it its most effective means of publicising itself and therefore favourable consequences for recruitment and the retention of members.

⁵⁵ *The Imp*, 4 (April 1929), 4.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 22 May 1929.

⁵⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/2/16 Annual Report 1936/37.

Membership and social class.

The growth and decline of the League's membership gives an incomplete picture of the League that can be enhanced by looking at its social categorisation. There are, however, no records of membership that indicate class origins. Nevertheless some idea of the class issues that concerned the League can be gleaned from its debates and correspondence. They illustrate the recurrent tension between the political and social aspects of the League in the desire for as broad a representation of the classes as possible, on the one hand, and on the other, the manoeuvres of some branches to establish a degree of exclusivity in their social activities.

The need to recruit more working class members was referred to by League officials on a number of occasions. It was a contentious issue. For example, at the annual conference in 1927 a resolution proposed that:

...active steps should be taken in each branch to secure as members of the League more of the working class and humbler portions of the community. It views with disfavour practices in any branch which tend to discourage such portions of the community from joining the League, and recommends that these shall cease forthwith.⁵⁸

The resolution was passed only after the second sentence had been removed. It would seem, therefore, that either the meeting did not accept that some branches were actively trying to turn away working class applicants for membership, or that they did not wish to endorse officially that such practices occurred perhaps even to the extent of condoning them. One speaker referred to 'hundreds' of branches having '50 per cent of the working class represented on their committees', a statement that can be taken to mean that many branches had a significant working-class membership that had influence in branch affairs. Certainly such a proportion fully reflects the fact that between 1918 and 1939 the working class vote in England was divided roughly equally between Labour and the Conservatives.⁵⁹ Thus the desire for more working class members was not simply principled but also

⁵⁸ *The Imp*, 3 (June 1927), 5.

⁵⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 530.

pragmatic: they were needed in the campaign to defeat socialism. It was 'very important that young boys just starting life in the factories should be attracted to the League'.⁶⁰ The larger the branch the more likely it was to include a wider representation of the social classes, according to one member writing to *The Imp*. Such branches would be able to reject more effectively the accusation of the Socialist Party that the League wanted to be a 'select' organisation that '[shut] out those of the working class'.⁶¹ This was not, however, a policy that was invariably accepted by the branches and it was sometimes consciously subverted. For example, Leslie Wilkins recalled that:

Junior Imperial League [dances] were "democratic" in that they were open to all at a reasonable price, however, only those who presented themselves in proper evening dress or dinner jackets were admitted.⁶²

Such snobbery was not uncommon. Victor Raikes, Vice Chairman of the East Midlands Federation, drew attention to the deleterious effects of snobbery in some branches. Any branch committee in which 'all [were] much the same social standing' resulted in the branch becoming an 'exclusive club'.⁶³ Snobbery was also uppermost in the mind of a member of the Hampstead branch who attended a course in 1930 for League members at Ashridge, the Conservative Party's training establishment. Although sceptical on arrival, he was impressed by the fortnight he spent at the college and reported that 'there was not a trace of snobbishness or class-consciousness',⁶⁴ suggestive that it was something that he had expected to encounter. Snobbery, however, remained an issue throughout the nineteen-thirties. W.S. Shepherd, a member of the North London Council of the League, spoke in 1938 of 'many branches where a worker is not welcome and we have made the average £2-£3 a week worker suspicious of the Conservative Party'.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *The Imp*, 3 (June 1927), 8.

⁶¹ *The Imp*, 4 (February 1936), 8.

⁶² Leslie T. Wilkins, 'Unofficial Aspects of a Life in Policy Research', <www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/overlays/policyresearch.pdf> [accessed 8 October 2007].

⁶³ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 10.

⁶⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (September 1930), 6.

⁶⁵ *Torchbearer*, 2 (November 1938), 3.

It is difficult to assess the intensity and salience of snobbishness among members of the League and attempts to turn away members of the working-class. It is clear, however, that recruitment of working-class people was seen as essential to the electoral success of the Conservative party. After the First World War, 'occupational class' became a more important factor in determining how people voted than it had been before the war when religious allegiance had been more relevant.⁶⁶ The leadership of the League recognised this but some members, perhaps those who regarded social events as more important in the League's activities than political ones, did not always agree. If so, this illustrates the continuing tension in the League between political necessity and social convenience. Thus, although a working-class person who voted Tory was welcome to the League politically, his or her presence at social events might be considered unsettling and undesirable to middle-class members. Middle class sociability was different from that of the working classes⁶⁷ and it is not surprising, therefore, if this sometimes caused snobbery in some League branches.

Recruitment from a wide field was seen as important by the leadership of the League.⁶⁸ In late 1928 the League launched a major campaign to attract new members. A 'special Imp recruiting film produced by the Gaumont Company... must have been seen by about 1,000,000 people during the recruiting period'.⁶⁹ Going to the cinema was an activity widely enjoyed and the film would therefore have been seen by members of all classes. However, another part of the campaign, the publication of recruiting campaign letters over the signatures of leading members of the Conservative party gave the League a strong upper-class image but no more so than the Tory party itself. The signatories were Stanley Baldwin, Mrs Baldwin, Lord Balfour, J.C.C. Davidson, Lord Birkenhead, Earl Beatty, John Buchan, Lord Lonsdale, Field-Marshal Lord Plumer and Lord Derby.

Nevertheless the League's membership was eclectic and it would be wrong to identify it exclusively with any particular social class. At the very extremes of the

⁶⁶ Robert Waller, 'Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class', in *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. by Anthony Selden and Stuart Ball (Oxford, 1994), pp. 579-610 (p. 588).

⁶⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, passim.

⁶⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/4 Central Council Meeting 22 October 1932.

⁶⁹ *The Imp*, 4 (January 1929), 2.

class structure it included such diverse people as Lord Eustace Percy (1887-1958), a son of the seventh duke of Northumberland, and a Derbyshire coal miner who was a member of the Alfreton branch of the League, who wrote in March 1927, in the aftermath of an acrimonious strike by coal miners that had lasted for eight months and ended in their defeat in December 1926,⁷⁰ that he was a Conservative ‘because it was the only party that stands for God, King and Empire’.⁷¹ Of these three institutions it was probably the Empire that most enabled such extremes of the social order to join the League in a common cause.

We know no more about the imperial sentiments of this Derbyshire coal miner than those expressed in his letter and this typifies a particular problem in any attempt to analyse the imperial beliefs of ordinary members of the League: documentary records of the imperial thoughts, beliefs and actions of ordinary people are rarer than those who have a ‘public presence’.⁷² Thus, for example, Percy’s imperial thinking is expressed in his published memoirs:

It may have been the tragedy of the Empire between the [two world] wars that the statesmen of the late nineteenth century had made an imperial policy but neglected to make, in any serious sense, an imperially minded nation. ...if imperial-mindedness be at all a matter of educated manners, we had not begun to have a national system of secondary education until [1902]’.⁷³

The introduction of effective imperial propaganda in schools began, earlier than Percy suggests, in the 1880s⁷⁴ and by the beginning of the twentieth century the ‘schools seemed to be bringing the working-class imperial bacon home’.⁷⁵ It follows that many of the young men and women who were members of the League in the inter-war years, and their parents before them, were products of this curriculum and it may help to explain the rate of expansion in the League’s membership between 1918 and 1939; an increasing proportion of British youth had acquired imperial-

⁷⁰ Margaret Morris, *The General Strike* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.306.

⁷¹ *The Imp*, 2 (March 1927), 3.

⁷² Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p. 205.

⁷³ Eustace Percy, *Some Memories* (London, 1958), p. 84.

⁷⁴ Bernard Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 174.

⁷⁵ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 200.

mindedness and had learned to think imperially and were thus attracted to an organisation that had adopted 'For Empire' as its slogan.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century there was a growing emphasis placed on the teaching of history in schools and by 1900 it was made compulsory in elementary schools. Young children would thus develop feelings of 'patriotism' and 'national pride'.⁷⁶ The Board of Education believed that young children could not understand their nationality unless they were taught 'how the British nation grew and how the mother country...has founded daughter countries beyond the seas'.⁷⁷ It discouraged references in the classroom to 'radicalism and systematic criticism of the socio-political order' and wanted the history books used to contain 'romantic' narratives of imperial manly heroism exemplified by General Gordon and Lord Nelson. The new curriculum thus attempted to inculcate a sense of the Anglo-Saxon superiority of Great Britain and its Dominions and recognition that Britain had a duty to civilise and develop its dependent colonies. One cannot easily assess the impact of such a programme on the children and whether it might have led some of them to support the Empire politically. However, that schoolchildren were capable of being active in the League is illustrated by the example of William Turpin who at the age of fifteen in 1939, with the help of fellow pupils, succeeded in setting up a branch of the League in a Yorkshire village with an initial twenty members.⁷⁸ If young people were imperially minded they were perhaps more likely to join the Junior Imperial League than the youth organisation of any other political party, even if they were working-class, because as Jonathan Rose has observed⁷⁹

'[g]rass-roots working-class activists in the Liberal, Labour and Communist parties were almost uniformly anti-imperialist, while those who were less interested in politics generally brought a healthy apathy to imperial issues.'

⁷⁶ Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (Toronto, 2000), pp. 41-42.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race*, pp. 43-50.

⁷⁹ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 335.

It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasise the dominance of the League as a force for youthful imperialism. As discussed earlier, the Young Liberals resented the League's presumption of a monopoly of imperial sentiment.⁸⁰

No individual who joined the League was likely to be hostile to the Empire although one can speculate that some who joined for purely social reasons may have been indifferent to it. The League was closely bound up with the Conservative party whose belief in the Empire was manifest. For example, in *Looking Ahead*, a Tory publication reviewed in *The Imp*, it was asserted that 'to strengthen and develop the Empire by every possible means is the first item in the programme of the Unionist Party.'⁸¹ Senior League figures who addressed the League's membership conveyed a similar message to the youth of the country. Any attempt, however, to assess the depth and breadth of the imperial thoughts of League members is problematical because of the need to rely on the League's limited documentary sources. It would be wrong to assert that the sole purpose of the League was the preservation and advancement of the British Empire, but it clearly mattered to members when particular issues such as the governance of India and trade with the Dominions came to prominence in the nation's political agenda.

In respect of the more mundane activities of the League, imperialism is present through, for example, its regular and prevalent recognition of Empire Day each year and provides evidence that the celebration of Empire Day in the inter-war years was of political importance, although this has been largely overlooked by historians.⁸² It began, in 1904, as a ceremony in schools and soon spread to the wider community so that '[by the 1920s] it seems reasonable to conclude that the idea of [Empire Day] as a fixed and national celebration had taken root across a broad section of the population'.⁸³ During that period, almost all members of the League would have known Empire Day activities as an annual event throughout their entire lives and many would have regularly participated in them during their schooldays. Later, in celebrating Empire Day as members of the League, they became part of the '[political] right [us]ing Empire day as a means of spreading

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 1 April 1929.

⁸¹ *The Imp*, 4 (February 1929), 5.

⁸² Jim English, 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 247-296.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 257.

political propaganda and attacking socialism'.⁸⁴ Celebrating Empire Day was not the only common element of the League's imperialism as can be seen, for example, in speeches by Plumer, who referred to the need 'to impress on members of the League, actual and potential, the responsibilities which devolve upon them as citizens of our Empire' and Beatty who declared one of the purposes of the League to be 'to educate the youth of the nation in a full and complete knowledge of the British Constitution and our great Empire'.⁸⁵

The sentiments of these speeches and activities were not unfamiliar matters to members of the League. Many had personal, non-institutional, awareness of the Empire. As George Ayling, honorary secretary of the Midhurst Junior Conservative Association observed 'it is extremely rare to find anyone [in the League?] who has neither friend nor relative in one of the Dominions'⁸⁶ and his imperialism was strong enough for him to argue that the Tory party should change its name from 'Conservative and Unionist' to 'Conservative and Imperialist' in recognition of the loss of Ireland but the continuing importance of the Empire to conservatism. Conversely, there were others who wished to remove the word 'Imperial' from the League's name and replace it with 'Conservative'. One member explained that although he supported the Empire, it was now more appropriate to include the League's conservatism in its name.⁸⁷ The issue was discussed at a Central Council meeting a year later, in 1930, but it was decided 'by a large majority' that no change to the League's name was 'advisable'.⁸⁸ Some members continued to press for a change but, in 1938, there was still 'very great opposition to any change...particularly among the older members'⁸⁹ The question was further debated at the Annual Conference that year but a proposal to change the League's name was defeated by 217 votes to 176.⁹⁰ 'Imperial' was never removed from the League's name. Imperial thoughts and deeds were undoubtedly closely associated with the League but it is difficult to gauge their strength and it may be, as some historians have concluded of the wider imperial picture, that in the League too, 'Empire was

⁸⁴ English, 'Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958', p. 275.

⁸⁵ *The Imp*, 4 (January 1929), 3.

⁸⁶ *The Imp*, 4 (February 1929), 4.

⁸⁷ *The Imp*, 5 (May 1929), 4.

⁸⁸ *The Imp*, 5 (March 1930), 2.

⁸⁹ *Torchbearer*, 2 (March 1938), 27.

⁹⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/2/18.

taken for granted and that which is taken for granted can be almost unseen.’⁹¹ If so, this would help to explain why references to the personal imperial connections of individual members are rare in the League’s publications and records. However, it is possible that League members were not generally conversant with the Empire.

For example, at a conference of the Royal Empire Society in December 1937, attended by young people from many parts of the Empire, including members of the League, it was concluded that: ‘[o]ne fact that emerged very strongly...was the lack of knowledge in the various parts of the Commonwealth of the conditions of life and the problems of...other parts’.⁹² It may well be that this general remark did not do full justice to metropolitan youth, whose knowledge of the Dominions might be expected to be greater than, say, an Indian’s understanding of New Zealand. This did not mean, however, that members of the League were not keenly interested in imperial matters. At League meetings debates about the Empire occurred often, even if usually in the narrow limits of issues affecting only the Dominions and India, as will be seen in the discussion of the League’s ideology in Chapter 4.

There is evidence that class relations in the League mirrored the structure of its organisation. There was a strong positive correlation between position in the League hierarchy and position in society in general. Peers were in many senior positions; from 1906 until 1945, the President of the League was always a peer. The involvement of aristocrats in the League carries a hint of *noblesse oblige*.

In the 1920s, when a federal structure was being created, peers were often appointed as federation presidents. For example, in 1927 Lady Plymouth was made president of the West Midlands Federation and the Marquess of Tichfield held the equivalent position in the East Midlands.⁹³ The appointment of aristocratic individuals to leading positions does not necessarily imply their close involvement in the affairs of the League. At the annual general meeting of the West Midlands Federation in 1935, Lady Plymouth was absent as were the Earl of Bradford and Viscount Bridgeman. The 131 members present were, with the exception of a

⁹¹ Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p. 205.

⁹² *Torchbearer*, 2 (January 1938), 8.

⁹³ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/3 Central Council Meeting 12 February 1927.

middle-rank army officer, all untitled people.⁹⁴ On other occasions the peerage was more attentive. At the inaugural meeting of the Sussex Federation in 1929, Lord Eustace Percy was elected its president. Viscount Gage chaired the proceedings and he was accompanied on the platform by the Earl of Plymouth, Lady Shiffner, Rear-Admiral T. P.H. Beamish and only a handful of untitled persons. After the meeting the delegates were entertained to tea 'through the generosity' of Lady Shiffner and Viscount Gage.⁹⁵

The presence of peers was an almost universal feature of imperial activist groups at least until the Second World War. Before the First World War, almost every group had a significant aristocratic element with the Women's Guild of Empire (founded in 1914) being a notable exception. Peers continued to be active in imperial groups in the inter-war years and had active leadership roles. Thus, for example, Lord Long was president of the EDU and Lord Hunsdon chaired the founding committee of the EIA. This does not mean, however, that the middle classes did not participate in the management of imperial activist groups. Thus, for example, Henry Page-Croft emerged as leader of the EIA; and the IES and IEL, in the 1930s, had a strong upper-middle class element alongside a few peers.

The central management of the JIL was also upper middle class, certainly until the early 1930s. In the branches themselves matters were more egalitarian with chairmen and secretaries generally ambitious young people from lower classes. The League's records contain the names of many individuals and the offices they held but the possibility of analysing the changing class aspects of the League in the context of who held power in the League is problematical. Those who were aristocratic or at least upper-class and who led the League have left more details of their lives than those further down the social scale. This absence of information about ordinary members and the class to which they belonged means that no firm conclusions can be drawn about the League and its class structure. Nevertheless, a strong impression can be gained from reading the records that the League became more middle class during the 1930s. This is not surprising because between the wars the emergence of a larger, different middle class was a national social trend.⁹⁶ For an

⁹⁴ Bodn. CPA ARE 6/1/1.

⁹⁵ *The Imp*, 4 (March 1929) 4.

⁹⁶ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p46.

aristocrat or upper class individual, personal contact and common educational backgrounds such as Eton, Oxford and Cambridge, meant entry into influential positions in the League were made easy. This was not the case for middle class members who had to work their way up the League hierarchy or catch the eye of established politicians through their energy and speechmaking skills.

Bernard Braine is one such example. The son of a clerk in the Admiralty, he was born in 1914. After leaving Hendon grammar school he began his career as a clerical officer in the civil service and joined the Junior Imperial League in 1933. By 1938 he had risen to be chairman of the Home Counties S.E. Federation and Surrey Group Council of the League. During his military career in the Second World War he rose from private soldier to lieutenant-colonel. In 1950 he was elected to parliament and remained a member until 1992. Braine was an active and very influential member of the League in the nineteen-thirties and was described in an anonymous article in *Torchbearer* in August 1938 as having ‘made himself the effective spokesman of [the] movement’ to make the League a greater force in the Conservative party. In a speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 1937 he had argued for a much greater recognition of the League and for its full involvement in serious Tory politics: ‘We wish to be something more than the lickings of envelopes and the folders of circulars. We wish to be partners in a great firm’, by which he meant the Conservative party. Braine’s remark was not wholly justified. For example, in the general election in 1929 sixteen members of the League, all under thirty and who were clearly not mere clerks, had stood for election. These young men, all born between 1897 and 1906, were, with only two exceptions, aristocratic or upper middle-class. Their predominant social characteristics were their education at public schools and Oxford or Cambridge, their military service in the First World War and their membership of the legal profession. Almost without exception they held senior office in the League as president or chairman of one of its federations or divisions, or sat on its Central Council or Executive Committee. It is not possible to know whether they arrived at these senior positions through years of mundane service as ordinary branch members or, more likely perhaps, rapidly to the senior organisational levels of the League. They were, however, by 1929, indeed ‘partners in a great firm’ whose days folding League circulars were, if they existed at all, probably perfunctory. In any event, they were not the children of clerks and saddlers

but of such as the Marquess of Londonderry, of the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall and of Thomas Cook, head of the dynastic travel agent.⁹⁷ Certainly public school boys were perceived in the League as more politically competent; when a League national debating competition was mooted in the 1930s, one of the rules was that nobody educated at a public school should be permitted to enter.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, in June 1938 Braine's wishes became reality when, following organisational changes in the Tory party, he was able to declare that the youth of the party had, at last, become 'equal partners' in the Conservative Party. This new arrangement brought much greater representation of the League on the Conservative party constituency associations, on Area Councils and on the Central Council of the National Union. 'Thus, at every stage of party organisation--constituency, area and national--the League is brought into full partnership'. It was according to Sir Douglas Hacking, the chairman of the party, on an equal footing with 'the separate men's and women's organisations'.⁹⁹ Bernard Braine's parliamentary career was moderately successful. He held junior positions in government until 1964 and spent the rest of his time on the backbenches where he 'could easily have been mistaken for a traditional Tory knight of the shires' and came to be seen as 'a desperate reactionary'. Throughout his career he maintained his 'high conception of Britain's imperial role' supporting the decision to invade Suez, and opposing sanctions against Rhodesia.¹⁰⁰ Bernard Braine's career illustrates the rise of a lower middle-class imperialist through the ranks of Tory political power.

Another example of a lower middle-class individual who rose to ministerial rank in the government was Patricia Hornsby-Smith. She was an exact contemporary of Braine and her father was a saddler and umbrella maker. She was educated at Richmond county school and left there to do secretarial work. She joined the Junior Imperial League on 1930 and quickly became prominent as a very effective public speaker. Her involvement in politics led to her being appointed as principal private secretary to Lord Selborne, minister of economic warfare, in 1941. She was elected to the House of Commons in 1950 and remained there, with a break of four years,

⁹⁷ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1929), 7-8.

⁹⁸ *The Imp*, 5 (August 1930), 10.

⁹⁹ *Torchbearer*, 2 (October 1938), 3.

¹⁰⁰ *ODNB*.

until 1974 and held several government posts.¹⁰¹ Like Bernard Braine, she never attained cabinet rank but she illustrates the opportunity to experience a successful political career that was increasingly open to the youth of the Tory lower middle-class that grew to maturity in the inter-war years and who can be contrasted with the cohort of young League members who stood for election to parliament in 1929.

One of the reasons for the bias towards the selection of upper-class candidates was that some Tory candidates, unlike their political opponents, were expected to defray the costs of their constituency activities amounting to several hundred pounds annually and an additional sum at the time of an election.¹⁰² This rankled with impecunious League members who had political ambitions. At a meeting of the League Council in 1939, a motion was passed unanimously urging the party to select the candidates ‘on personal ability rather than financial standing’ and opined that the ‘excessive demands...on Members of Parliament and Prospective Candidates...in the form of...election expenses [were] detrimental to the best interests of the Party’.¹⁰³ However, the need for such financial resources did not apply to local politics, a point made by William Ray, leader of the London County Council, in a speech to League members in 1927.¹⁰⁴ Seeking local office, he said, was an easier and less costly way for ‘ambitious young men and women’ to further their political careers than standing for parliament. It may well be that what one is seeing here are circumstances that tended to divide young Tory candidates into those whose wealth enabled them to stand for parliament, and those of lesser means, and class, who were limited, at least early in their careers, to seeking positions in local government. Stephen McAdden illustrates the latter. He left school early to take employment as an office boy and subsequently as a labourer. He joined the Junior Imperial League and became chairman of its West Toxteth branch in 1929. In 1937, at the age of twenty-nine, he was elected to Hackney Borough Council. It was only after the war, in early middle age, that he became a member of parliament in 1950. One can speculate that he might have been a parliamentary candidate at a younger age, at the 1935 general election, had he been of a higher social class. McAdden was strongly supportive of the Commonwealth, voted against sanctions against Rhodesia,

¹⁰¹ *ODNB*.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 14 March 1928.

¹⁰³ *Torchbearer*, 3 (March 1939), 1.

¹⁰⁴ *The Imp*, 2 (January 1927), 2.

and opposed Britain's entry into the Common Market without proper safeguards for the Commonwealth's interests. Like the Derbyshire miner, he demonstrates the existence of working class Conservative imperialism in the Junior Imperial League.¹⁰⁵

We have seen in this discussion of the class structure of the League that it drew its membership from all classes and this relative social diversity is arguably one of its defining features. In particular, it afforded an opportunity for people from different social classes to intermingle in the pursuit of common political and social activities, and to do so in their adolescence and early adulthood when an individual's tenets and beliefs may be more readily malleable than in later life. The leadership of the League was aware of this and therefore emphasised the need to attract young boys and girls away from socialism. The individual branches and, for some, the courses at Ashridge, afforded an opportunity to learn about Conservatism and its belief in the maintenance of the constitution and the Empire. The League was essentially about the organisation of young people and, as has been observed in relation to non-political movements like the Boys Brigade and Boy Scouts, it may have 'helped to absorb the upwardly aspiring into the ranks above them in the status hierarchy'.¹⁰⁶ One cannot be certain about the extent to which this happened in the League because ordinary people whose names we see in the attendance records of branch meetings, divisional assemblies and national rallies have, with few exceptions, left no details of their changing social status. However, as has been shown by the examples of Braine, Hornsby-Smith and McAdden such absorption did occur. From the middle of the 1920s, the effects of the expansion of secondary education and of newspapers, radio and cinema brought knowledge of better opportunities than youth groups for young men and women to move upwards through political and social strata.¹⁰⁷ Consequently the popularity of youth organisations for those in the lower social strata declined and this might partly explain the fall in membership of the League in the nineteen-thirties.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 28 December 1979.

¹⁰⁶ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 122.

It would be wrong to be definitive about any similarities between the League and other youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade and the Boy Scouts. Springhall, perhaps wrongly, specifically excludes what he refers to as the Young Conservatives from his book, on the grounds that it was not a youth movement because it did not 'propagat[e]...a code of living, compet[e] for awards and badges...and provide [members] with ... a uniform'.¹⁰⁸ The League, however, did provide its youth with a (political) code, and badges and awards were a constant aspect of its activities. It was also part of the substantial and fashionable increase in the number of youth movements, both political and non-political, in the two decades from 1890 and thus it might be expected that they shared some common characteristics. An important one was that the structure of the hierarchies of these youth organisations was, as has already noted of the League, positively correlated with social status; those in the higher echelons of the class structure tended to retain their hold on the senior positions. As far as the League itself is concerned, this was not an obstacle to social mobility within its ranks. The significant change in class characteristics during the nineteen-thirties meant that social mobility was not merely upward movement through a rigid hierarchy of unchanging classes. This is particularly true of the middle classes, and it was a development that was beneficial to the League.

The middle class that began to emerge at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties was increasingly likely to be self-employed, and more managerial and technical in nature.¹⁰⁹ It was a 'modern' middle-class and differed from its Edwardian predecessor which had been more centred on the medical, legal and religious professionals working on their own behalf. Not only did the middle-class become much larger from the middle of the inter-war years, but it developed a greater strength of feeling about a general need to defend the constitution, an earlier and specific manifestation of which can be seen in its pragmatic opposition to the general strike in 1926.¹¹⁰ The maintenance of the constitution, and of the Empire, was a fundamental tenet of Conservatism and it is therefore to be expected that there was a conflation of middle-class and Tory beliefs. This is not to suggest that the

¹⁰⁸ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 46.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 58.

middle classes were always Tory or that Tories were always middle class, but it reinforces the argument that the League was increasingly permeated with middle class members and values during the inter-war years. As one historian has concluded: '[t]he Conservative Party was, indeed, anxious both to assimilate and represent the newer middle class'.¹¹¹ The Junior Imperial League is an important example of this, and one that has been neglected by historians.

Conclusion

The determination of its leadership to revive the Junior Imperial League immediately after the First World War provided a catalyst for a rapid growth in numbers during the nineteen-twenties. The League had lost many of its branch officials in the fighting, but all the League's most senior officials had survived the war and retained their belief in the importance of youth in party politics. The changed composition of the electorate in 1918, the ending of coalition government in 1922, and a succession of general elections contested by three substantial political parties created an environment in which interest in politics could thrive, an interest that was not confined to those who could vote at general elections. The franchise was not extended to all adult men and women until 1928 but it is a measure of the success of the League's growth in membership that it attracted a quarter of a million members between the ages of 14 and 25 years, many of whom did not have the vote. Especially for young unenfranchised women, the League was a new opportunity to engage in activities in a political context and they enrolled in such numbers that they were in the majority in some branches.

The leadership of the League was never satisfied with the number of young people joining its branches and frequently arranged national recruiting campaigns with the stated wish of reaching half a million members. The growth of popular entertainment media such as the cinema and wireless and a Conservative domination of politics in national governments throughout the nineteen-thirties that rendered party politics less combative and more 'unassertive',¹¹² acted against attempts to expand membership. It consequently fell to nearer 100,000 by the end of the decade

¹¹¹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 529.

¹¹² Jon Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Politics after the First World War', *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), 185-216 (p. 195). Lawrence observes that 'the general election of 1935 was widely held to have been the quietest on record' (p. 215).

and it seems reasonable to conclude that, at least in terms of numbers, the League had reached its apogee by the beginning of the nineteen-thirties. That did not, however, weaken its importance within the organisation and hierarchy of the main party. It drew increasingly close to the constituency, area and national bodies of the Conservative party by increasing its representation and influence within them and thus enhancing the opportunities of young aspirant politicians to display their political skills to senior members of the party, from whatever stratum of society they came. As we have seen some, such as Bernard Braine and Pat Hornsby-Smith, successfully grasped these opportunities. The League is an exemplar of the emergence of the new post-war middle-class that replaced the Edwardian version. It adapted to the changed socio-political situation after 1918 and left behind its upper-middle class masculine single-minded defence of empire and constitution, to become a much more feminine and socially mixed organisation, retaining a loyalty to king and Empire, but now more interested in a wider range of electoral issues.

The intermingling in the League's branches of young people of different classes was not without tension. Accusations of attempts to exclude working-class people from social functions, of snobbery and of forming cliques, were recurrent throughout the period. The leadership, and some ordinary members, were alert to the need to recruit from the working-class if the party were to be successful at elections. However, this political objective was to some extent subverted by those whose enjoyment of the social activities of League depended upon those around them being the 'right sort'. Nevertheless the membership of the league was socially remarkably diverse containing at one extreme the son of a duke and at the other a Derbyshire coal-miner. It is true that they occupied very different positions in the hierarchy of the League and there is evidence that there was a strong positive correlation between position in the hierarchy and social class: the aristocrats led, the middle-class managed and the lower classes participated.

The growth and social membership of the League was a microcosm of the changing social and political circumstances of the years between the two world wars. It was also, in some respects, typical of the changing nature of Conservatism:

Social occasions where the whole Conservative family met could definitely be awkward and were usually avoided. But the carefully managed sociability and the well-defined hierarchies were acceptable to their membership, who would have it no other way. That is why they were members.¹¹³

The bringing together of young Tory people in the League was not merely for social purposes, however. Although the fact that '[t]he 1920s and 1930s presented the younger generation, for the first time, with the opportunity to turn the pursuit of leisure into a major object of life'¹¹⁴ was important in any impact the League could make, it also had a political purpose which it expressed in its ideology and activities.

¹¹³ Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), p. 95.

¹¹⁴ Martin Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2008), p. 203.

Chapter 4. The Junior Imperial League, 1918-39; its activities, ideology and impact

The organisation and the membership of the League formed the foundation on which it could pursue its various activities and seek to make an impact on the political scene. The individual branches of the League provided a milieu in which young men and women could mix socially and it will be suggested that these non-political pursuits throw some light on the manner in which men and women from different social classes mixed together during the inter-war years.

Branch activities were always, deliberately, a mixture of the sporting, social and political. There were two reasons for this: first, to attract young people into the branches, and second, to hold their interest during the more politically quiescent periods. Maintaining the right proportion of political and non-political activities could sometimes be controversial but the leadership of the League was clear that its main purpose was to support Conservatism. Although sometimes challenging the leadership's approach to imperial trade and to Indian governance, members of the League were strongly loyal to Stanley Baldwin. It was as an electoral machine that the League had most impact, and it will be argued that it was a significant resource for the Conservative party during general election campaigns.

The League stuck to its belief in the British Empire, which it implicitly defined as the Dominions and India, and did not always address as closely and vigorously its political objectives in the domestic arena as it did in the imperial. It preferred to react pragmatically to topical domestic issues rather than adopting a rigid ideological stance. The League's brand of imperialism had its roots in the ideas of Disraeli and Joseph Chamberlain, it will be argued, but the League gradually attenuated its imperialism throughout the period. It changed over time, and its metamorphosis took it from being an independent imperialist league of Tory young men before the First World War, to a political organisation of men and women with significant political skills, valued by the party, and more and more closely integrated into it.

Activities

In the League's *Handbook for Organisers and Workers*, branches are given clear guidance about the nature and purposes of their activities.

[They] should aim at maintaining a due proportion between their serious and their lighter activities. Sports and social events are useful in fostering comradeship and in attracting new members, but they must be kept subservient to the main purpose, which is to develop political education and systematic political work.¹

These two types of branch activities can be seen as dichotomous and yet symbiotic. They were dichotomous because of what many members, of both the League and the Conservative Party, saw as a division between those members who preferred social and sporting events and those who engaged in political activities, and yet symbiotic because social activities attracted young people into a political environment and sometimes even paid for political events. For example, in March 1927, the costs of a political demonstration organised by the Bristol Federation of the League were met from the 'proceeds of social gatherings'.² The 'social side...is really essential in keeping [members] together and in building up...spirit', but some senior Conservative Party members believed that 'political activities [in the branches] held a very secondary place to social activities',³ a view also expressed by a branch member who wrote:

Locally [in the Freshwater and Totland Branch of the League] we never seem to get anything [political] unless it is followed by a dance...At present the political side of the League is almost entirely in the background...⁴

This criticism echoed that of Hubert Oliver, the Hon. Secretary of the Oxford City Branch of the League, who wrote in January 1927 expressing concern that the balance of activities favoured the social rather than the political. He preferred a small branch of fifty members keen on politics to a branch of two hundred that 'scarcely ever touched upon' politics.⁵

¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/2 *Handbook for Organisers and Workers* (c.1926).

² *The Imp*, 2 No. 23 (March 1927), 1.

³ *The Imp*, 3 No.6 (March 1928), 6.

⁴ *The Imp*, 2 No. 23 (March 1927), 4.

⁵ *The Imp*, 2 No. 21 (January 1927), 3.

Whatever the relative strengths of social and political activities, it is clear that they were diverse both within and between branches. The Frazer Report (1937)⁶ quotes a League member, explaining with ‘perhaps...picturesque exaggeration’, that ‘a...meeting may mean Politics to a member in one Division; Tennis in the next Division; and Hiking in the next’.⁷ An article in *The Birmingham Post*, reprinted in *The Imp* in April 1930, provides evidence that contradicts Frazer’s remark about exaggeration.⁸ The diversity of branch activities is striking. According to the writer, there were well-managed lectures, debates and mock Parliaments all run by young members: ‘no-one over-age has anything to do with the direction of [meetings]’. However, the business of the branch was not all ‘dreadfully serious’. There were social activities especially in the winter when concerts, dances and whist drives were organised. In the summer there were rambles. Sports events were popular; ‘each branch’, the author claims, ‘has...clubs for football, cricket, tennis and swimming’. There is, perhaps, here, an example of ‘a youth movement...offer[ing] a...potential mechanism for the maintenance of class stability modelled on the public schools’.⁹

All of this is confirmed in a recruitment poster which declared: ‘Join the Imps if you want Sports...Social Life...Political Life’.¹⁰ The sequence in which these activities is presented to the reader may not be significant and indicative of the League’s priorities, but it is recognition that football and dancing are effective ways of drawing young people into political activity. As a member of the League explained in a letter to a local newspaper: ‘we mingle social activity with political, but our aim is to further the principles of our movement amongst young people.’¹¹ It was not an approach unique to the League. Although most imperial activist groups were much more political than social organisations, the Primrose League from late-Victorian times had had ‘a rich array of social events and entertainments’ in its many branches¹² and the Overseas Club, active from 1910 to the early 1920s, was

⁶ The Frazer Report, ‘Junior Imperial League Survey 1937’ made recommendations about closer organisational integration of the JIL and the Conservative Party.

⁷ Bodn, CPA CCO/506/4/2.

⁸ *The Imp*, 5 No. 59 (April 1930), [x].

⁹ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 123.

¹⁰ *The Imp*, 5 No. 58 (March 1930), 16.

¹¹ *Birmingham Mail*, 8 July 1938.

¹² Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 29.

principally a social organisation, reporting that ‘every branch...holds a banquet, concert, or patriotic demonstration’.¹³ Social activities were also an important ‘part of the routine’ of the National League of Young Liberals and of the Labour League of Youth.¹⁴ In the Junior Imperial League social activities should not be seen as subverting or replacing the political. On the contrary, they were a means of bringing cohesion and continuity to branches especially during the summer parliamentary recess and in periods of quiescent party political activity such as during the coalition government after the First World War. There was ‘little doubt that the policy of the League in encouraging the sport and social side ...had done much to keep the branches together during a very trying period’ when normal party politics were suspended.¹⁵ Furthermore, membership was cheap and so encouraged participation in recreational events: the annual subscription was only one shilling with additional contributions of a few pence to the cost of hiring halls.

Whatever view one takes about the seriousness or otherwise of branch activities, in the same year of *The Birmingham Post* report, the Finance Committee of the League was unequivocal that the League’s main purpose was not social: ‘the ideals of Empire’, it reported in May 1930, were ‘the cause for which the Junior Imperial League exists to promote’.¹⁶ These sentiments resonated with the aphorisms of Tory leaders at the beginning of the twentieth century: Lord Salisbury declared that Britain’s commerce could only flourish ‘under the shadow of the Empire’; Balfour was clear that the League’s aim was ‘consolidation of the Empire’; and Joseph Chamberlain exhorted members to ‘learn to think imperially’. These were beliefs that the League’s leadership thought important enough to give prominence to in a League pamphlet.¹⁷ Another pamphlet issued by the League in 1922, *What the League Can Do*¹⁸, highlighted, in a series of sub-headings, a more general political content to the League’s activities. First, the arousing in young people of interest in political work; then, political education by means of lectures, discussions and debates; and helping the local senior Conservative association at public meetings, in

¹³ *United Empire*, 6 no. 9 (September 1915), 652.

¹⁴ *The Nottingham Journal*, 13 January 1938.

¹⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Central Council 15 February 1922.

¹⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/5.

¹⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO/506/1/7.

¹⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Publications Committee 17 May 1922.

canvassing, registration of voters and in clerical work. These were practical political activities that saw the League's members as a political resource.

What was the balance between political and non-political activities in the League's branches? An analysis of branch reports may help to answer this question. Forthcoming events were not generally advertised in advance in *The Imp* but reports about them were published each month and included very brief summaries of branch activities in the immediately preceding weeks. Those for July 1930 are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8. Analysis of Branch Reports in *The Imp*, July 1930¹⁹

Type of activity	Number of mentions	% of total
Sports	22	23.7
Trips and outings	10	10.8
Dramatics	5	5.4
Dances	10	10.8
Talks	24	25.8
Rallies/demonstrations	7	7.5
Recruitment campaigns	3	3.2
Debates	6	6.4
Other	6	6.4
Total	93	100.0

Any conclusions drawn from this analysis can only be tentative because the sample is small and it relates only to one month. The activities of only 96 branches were recorded at a time when there were over one thousand branches, according to Layton-Henry.²⁰ Furthermore, although the analysis shows an equal balance between social and sporting activities on the one hand and political activities on the other, it is distorted by the activities of one area, Lancashire and Cheshire, which reported eleven of the total of twenty-four talks. The branch reports may have been selective;

¹⁹ *The Imp*, V (July 1930), [x].

²⁰ Z. Layton-Henry, 'The Young Conservatives, 1945-1970', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8 (April 1973), 143-156 (p. 144). James K. Pollock Jr, states that 'The Junior Imperial League has 1,500 branches and 250,000 members' ('British Party Organisation', p. 175).

social activities may have been chosen for mention rather than political ones, and *vice versa*. The analysis does, however, confirm the diversity of branch activities in the League and shows that they were, indeed, social, sporting and political. A directly imperial element was also present; four of the seven rallies were held to celebrate Empire Day.

There was, in the League's indoor activities, which included dances and dramatic performances, an echo of the Primrose League at the end of the nineteenth century. Even in that era in which the electorate was much smaller than the inter-war period, the Primrose League was conscious of the need to provide ways in which its members, even if they were non-electors, could mix with politicians in an entertaining social milieu. The Junior Imperial League imitated this policy and directly juxtaposed the social and the political: dances were often preceded or interrupted by a short political talk by an MP or other political dignitary. The 'music hall...harvest supper' of the Victorian Primrose League²¹ had been replaced by musicals such as *Imperial Follies* and by the dinner dance but their purpose was essentially the same: to entice members to a social occasion which had political content.

In the Junior Imperial League's outdoor activities there were also faint echoes of the late nineteenth century. Although cycling does not seem to have been especially popular in the League, at least one branch participated. Paignton arranged a cycle tour in the summer of 1930. The late Victorian and Edwardian interest in cycling for pleasure had been largely middle class but in the nineteen-thirties it was 'predominantly a working-class pursuit',²² and perhaps the apparent scarcity of League cyclists demonstrates the relative absence of working-class people in the League's membership. Regardless of class, the high proportion of sporting activities in the branches is a direct consequence of a particular trend in the use of leisure time in the inter-war years. It was a period of rapid expansion in outdoor activities.

²¹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 29.

²² Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside: A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 248.

Rambling exemplified most powerfully the boom in outdoor activities. Until the attempt by the government to encourage such activities through the National Fitness Council created by legislation in 1937, they had been largely driven by voluntary organisations such as the Junior Imperial League. The fashion for rambling grew in the nineteen-twenties and early nineteen-thirties and was seen to be socially distinct from, and superior to, hiking. ‘Ramblers saw themselves as an elite with an interest in topography and tended to be drawn from the liberal professions’ whereas hikers were merely ‘fair-weather walkers more likely to be from ‘the lower-middle and upper-working classes’.²³ It is interesting to note that many League members were enthusiastic ramblers and that references to hiking are missing in their report of activities in July 1930. That month, for example, the West Nottingham branch formed a rambling club, Swinton reported ‘very successful rambles’ and Grangetown had held ‘a regular series of rambles’.²⁴ We are not given details of these rambles, such as how well they were attended or by whom but it seems safe to assume that they were enjoyed by both men and women and afforded an opportunity for them to mix together in relaxed, yet organised, circumstances that enabled them to converse informally on topics of mutual interest. Being outdoors enabled men and women to mingle in ‘a space of equality and freedom...which did not respect conservative conventions of freedom’.²⁵ However, the presence of female ramblers was not acceptable to some supporters of established societal conventions, largely because of their attire; it was not proper behaviour, they believed, for women to wear shorts and thus expose their knees. Despite this criticism there were other opportunities for men and women to enjoy outdoor activities together whilst wearing sports attire. Tennis sections were formed by many branches and, at least in the early nineteen-thirties, was second in popularity only to rambling.

The social standing of tennis during the first half of the twentieth century moved downwards through the classes from an upper-class activity to a more universal game. However, from its earliest days in the later Victorian years, tennis had provided an opportunity for men and women to mix socially in a sporting environment; it could ‘be played by either sex or by both together. Therein lay its

²³ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: a Modern History* (Oxford, 1989), p. 200.

²⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 15.

²⁵ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), p. 80.

true social importance'.²⁶ Tennis expanded rapidly after the First World War from about a thousand clubs affiliated to the Lawn Tennis Association in 1914 to almost 3,000 by the end of the nineteen-thirties and what had originally been a sport for the upper-classes, often played in country houses, had spread to the lower-middle classes many of whom played on municipal courts. Many of the new tennis clubs were frequented by 'players whose dress fell "considerably short of English standards"' and thus struck a 'vulgar' note and brought a lowering of standards.²⁷

It is difficult to draw any clear conclusions, from these comments, about the degree to which tennis facilitated the mixing of the social classes because the fact that different social classes played the game does not necessarily mean that they did so together. It does appear, however, that tennis was not a sport much favoured by the working classes in the inter-war years. Indeed, Tony Mason argues that 'middle-class sports, like golf and tennis...enabled the middle class to segregate themselves from their inferiors'.²⁸ Although tennis was a snobbish game before 1914 and became more universally played thereafter, snobbery could still be present in the inter-war years. Birley observes that the requirement to wear white (cream) not coloured clothes 'was as important as the postal address of the tennis club'.²⁹ This statement recalls the remark by a Junior Imperial League member that the requirement to wear a dinner jacket ensured that only people of an acceptable social kind attended League dinners even though the cost of a ticket was within the reach of the lower classes. One can speculate that a dress code set a similar standard at tennis parties. Whether or not different classes mixed at League games of tennis, it seems clear that men and women did: 'Tennis was marvellous for meeting members of the opposite sex. Off court was probably as important as on court' for doing so in the nineteen-twenties³⁰. One can reasonably assume that such 'marvellous' meetings also occurred when tennis was played by members of the League. A sentence in a contemporary official report is graphically evocative of such post-match occasions: '[t]he cigarette held between slim fingers has become one of the symbols of female

²⁶ Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 126.

²⁷ Derek Birley, *Playing the Game: Sport and British Society, 1910-1945* (Manchester, 1995), p. 166.

²⁸ Tony Mason, 'Afterword', in *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, ed. by Tony Mason (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 344-354, (p. 346).

²⁹ Birley, *Playing the Game*, p. 272.

³⁰ Helen Walker, 'Lawn Tennis', in *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, ed. by Tony Mason (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 245-275 (p. 252).

emancipation, while lighting a girl's cigarette is fast becoming a romantic cliché.'

³¹Arguably, tennis in the League, as a part of its mixture of social and political activities, provided an excellent means for young women to enjoy their burgeoning sexual and political emancipation. From the point of view of branch committees, it was an example of how to maintain continuity during the summer months when interest in politics declined bringing the risk that some members might lose touch and not return in the autumn for the real purpose of the branch: politics.

Other sporting arrangements reported by the branches were more general in nature, referring only to the setting up of a sports committee or sub-section. It is reasonable to assume that they included men and women in proportion to the overall membership of the branches. In any event, it seems that the League was keen to follow sporting fashion closely and not to be seen to be lagging behind the socio-sporting trends of the period. The Lincoln branch formed a ladies' cricket section in 1930 not long after the emergence of organised women's cricket and its first 'public match' played in 1929 received extensive reporting by the press.³² Nascent organised women's cricket was a manifestation of what Alison Light has referred to as the movement by women away from identifying themselves with 'the men in their lives' and increasingly to '[represent] modernity in the post-war generation'.³³ Certainly, as was discussed in the section on membership in Chapter 3, women had their own, strong, identity in the League and spoke up for their political beliefs. Light argues that this feminist modernity helps to explain 'the domestication of the imperial idea between the wars' and 'the elaboration of imperial fantasies'. If so it may well be a reason for the appeal of the League to young women of the period. It was indeed a time and a 'world... in which the sexes meet on more practical terms than in the past'.³⁴ Women joined the League in large numbers and Martin Pugh is clearly wrong to state that the League 'remained adamantly male...during the 1920s'.³⁵

³¹ From *Report of the Imperial Economic Committee* 10 August 1928, cited in *Chronicle of Britain and Ireland*, ed. by H. Heald (Farnborough, 1992), quoted in Birley, *Playing the Game, Sport and British Society, 1910-45*, p. 37.

³² *Barclays World of Cricket*, ed. by E. W. Swanton (London, 1986), p. 612.

³³ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991), p. 211.

³⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1929.

³⁵ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 180.

The range of outdoor activities organised throughout the extensive branch network of the League makes it difficult to draw any firm political or social conclusions. Rambling, cycling, tennis and cricket in the summer; football and hockey in the winter suggest an apolitical and classless mixture of activities that fell short of a full-bloodedly public school sporting ethos; there was no rugby or rowing, as far as one can tell. Some games did have political connotations. Socialists regarded cricket as elitist but nonetheless, at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties, the British Workers' Sports Federation introduced cricket as one of its activities. This most quintessential of English pastimes was capable of 'bind[ing] the nation and Empire together'³⁶, a sentiment that would have appealed strongly to members of the League, whether they played the game or not.

Similarly, it would be wrong to see the League ramblers as exclusively part of a right-wing movement; rambling appealed to all parts of the political spectrum, right and left. For example, the Clarion Rambling Club, founded in 1931, sprang, like its associated organisation the National Clarion Cycling Club (NCCC), from socialist roots. The organisations that participated in rambling were increasingly diverse and included the WEA as well as rotary clubs and church organisations and this suggests that rambling was not quite as strongly middle-class as Richard Holt has indicated. The Junior Imperial League was a part of this trend in outdoor activities which was 'predominantly a youth movement'. For the League it was a way of bringing youth to politics through leisure and the same was true of the NCCC. However, both organisations saw the combination as less effective than they wished. Critics of the NCCC were disappointed in the dilution of the political commitment of its members by the overly-enthusiastic pursuit of outdoor activities, opining sarcastically that 'we propose to cycle and dance ourselves into the socialist commonwealth',³⁷ a taunt that might well have been made of the Junior Imperial League with 'British Empire' replacing 'socialist commonwealth'.

³⁶ Anthony Bateman, *Cricket, Literature and Culture: Symbolising the Nation, Destablising Empire* (Farnham, 2009), p. 92.

³⁷ Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside*, p.247.

One might reasonably expect that the activities of League branches in high summer would contain a high proportion of outdoor and sporting events but, indoors, political ideas were not neglected. Thirty out of the ninety-three branches who reported their activities in July 1930 held debates or listened to talks. Perhaps surprisingly, examination of the branch reports in the mid-winter month of January of that year shows proportionately less debating activity: only thirty-eight branches out of 191 reported that they held debates or listened to talks. It would be facile to draw firm conclusions about the seasonality of branches' political activities from such a small sample of data. However, the fact that the number of branches who reported in July was less than half of those in December may indicate that the overall level of activity in the branches fell away in summer, at least in preparing reports for the League's magazine. We can be certain that political topics were addressed throughout the year and that outdoor activities did not preclude them even at the height of the summer. Perhaps in winter the proportion of indoor social events outweighed the proportion devoted to the outdoors in summer because members were, by nature, more disposed to participate in indoor events than outdoor.

Of the debates and political talks in January 1930, twenty-two (55%) were on political topics; twelve (30%) on sporting or cultural subjects; and six (15%) on other matters.³⁸ Topics included an apparently frivolous debate, 'That this house is in favour of men's dress reform', but frequently addressed serious issues. Political topics included socialism, the performance of Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government, unemployment and capital punishment. The imperial content of the League was manifested in debates, in five of the branches, on Empire Free Trade (a campaign to protect imperial trade launched by Lord Beaverbrook in June 1929);³⁹ on Safeguarding; and on Imperial Preference. It is clear from this analysis of members' activities in their local boroughs, towns and villages that they were not monomaniacal imperialists. Indeed, one cannot argue that they unswervingly pursued the purpose of 'advancing the cause of Imperial Unity' stated in the League's founding principles in the way that, for example, the League of Empire Loyalists did a generation later. But as we have seen, this was not, anyway, their sole purpose. They were also charged with furthering the Conservative cause in general.

³⁸ *The Imp*, 5 (January 1930), 13-16.

³⁹ L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, Vol.3, *The Unforgiving Years, 1929-1940* (London, 1955), p.22.

This they did with great vigour when an opportunity arose. The most important opportunities were at local elections, by-elections and general elections and the valuable efforts of League members at these elections were recognised by senior party officials. For example, in July 1930, the Election Agent for Nottingham, Ian Campbell-Robertson, wrote to *The Imp* praising League members at a recent by-election:

...at Central Nottingham, ...our success was to a great extent due to the exertions of a willing band of helpers, which largely included members of the League.

It did not seem to matter what the job was, they undertook it cheerfully, and proved themselves reliable and often acted on their own initiative...canvassing, delivering circulars, attending our own or opponents' meetings...heckl[ing] outdoor speakers...⁴⁰

However, such undiluted support for the local Conservative cause was not always the case. Sometimes their support for the Empire mattered more to League members than loyalty to the Conservative party. At the East Fulham by-election in October 1933, *The Evening Standard* reported that the Tory candidate was 'in trouble with the local branch of the Junior Imperial League for less than wholehearted support of Empire Free Trade'. In the early nineteen-thirties, according to one historian, the League was generally dissatisfied with the lack of support by parliamentary candidates for this issue.⁴¹

There are many expressions of praise for the work done by members of the League at general elections, by-elections and local elections. Two examples at general elections are: the annual report for 1922 referring to the 'valuable work...displayed by the Branches'; and in 1924 to the 'ungrudging commendation of [MPs], Candidates and Agents in all parts of the country for the work of the Branches'.⁴² At the local level, for example, thanks were expressed by local party officials for assistance given at the London County Council Elections in 1922; and at County Council elections in 1925.⁴³ The League sustained its electoral activities

⁴⁰ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 10.

⁴¹ Richard Heller, 'East Fulham Revisited', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6 (1971), 172-196 (p. 181).

⁴² Bodn. CPA CCO 506/2/2 Annual Report 1922; CPA CCO 506/2/4.

⁴³ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/3 Executive Committee 15 March 1922; CPA CCO 506/1/3 Executive Committee 11 March 1925.

throughout the inter-war years. In its annual report in May 1937 it called for a 'fighting-force' to be available at the general election which 'will soon take place'.⁴⁴ The leadership of the League was similarly concerned with concerted effort at by-elections, announcing that it was standard policy for joint action at them by local branches.⁴⁵

Another important example of the League's mass national activity was the rally at Crystal Palace in 1930. It was expected to be 'the most ambitious gathering ever organised by the League'⁴⁶ surpassing even the rally held in March 1928 (which will be discussed in the section on ideology, below). It was attended by 8472 people⁴⁷ drawn from eighteen regional federations of the League who assembled for a Grand Parade before being addressed by Neville Chamberlain, Chairman of the Conservative Party. He began by recalling the speech made by Disraeli at the same venue in 1872 in which he had set out a vision of a 'united Empire bound together by an Imperial tariff'. Chamberlain's version of this was a quota system which would create products that were wholly domestic and imperial in content thus making 'the greatest contribution...[to] the development of inter-Imperial trade'.⁴⁸ Chamberlain's speech, as reported in *The Imp*, may be taken as indicative of the common priorities of the Party and the League and illustrates the political nature of the gathering. However, the activities that day were not purely political. The rally and speech were preceded by a Sports Meeting at which both men and women competed.⁴⁹ The League's recurrent juxtaposition of sporting, social and political activities was clearly manifested at the Crystal Palace rally on 20 September 1930. Indeed in a report in *The Imp* of events that day, the writer explains that 'sports contests [promote]...a sense of corporate unity...an efficient magnet for people who might otherwise not be drawn into a political field'.⁵⁰ This statement perhaps reveals a deliberately structured diversity in the League's activities in which leisure activities are merely a means towards achieving political ends.

⁴⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/2/16 Annual Report 1936/37.

⁴⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/3 Central Council 12 November 1924.

⁴⁶ *The Imp*, 5 (September 1930), 9.

⁴⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/1/4.

⁴⁸ *The Imp*, 5 (October 1930), 8.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 22 September 1930.

⁵⁰ *The Imp*, 5 (October 1930), 6.

Annual conferences could sometimes be relatively low key events but they were still reported in the national press⁵¹. For example, although the Annual Conference in London on 31 May 1930 was attended by over 600 people from branches throughout the country, with Lord Stanley MP in the chair, no-one from the highest echelons of the party, such as Baldwin, Churchill, Austen Chamberlain or Leo Amery was present but members unanimously expressed their loyalty to the leadership in a motion of ‘unabated confidence in...Stanley Baldwin’ and pledged to him their ‘undiminished support’. One speaker recalled that Baldwin had declared, a few years earlier that he ‘loved the “Imps”’; there could be no higher praise than that, she said.⁵² Relations with the leaders and senior officials of the Conservative party and were generally very good.

According to a Birmingham newspaper, it was at general elections that the League enjoyed its ‘hey-days’.⁵³ Although this may be overstating the case, because the League was also vigorous at by-elections and local elections, it may be justified because general elections mobilised the League’s resources nationally rather than simply locally. By-elections can be a way of gaining publicity for a pressure group’s cause but the participation of League members in them appears to have been primarily a means of helping the Tory candidate to secure election rather than as a way of gaining publicity for its own imperial beliefs. The major importance to the League of general elections is exemplified by the 1929 election. Thus the Executive Committee, which rarely intervened directly in the activities of branches, issued a directive on April 10th, that from the dissolution of Parliament until polling day (May 30th) ‘the [normal] activities of all Federations, Divisional Councils and Branches of the League shall be suspended’.⁵⁴ Branch members responded well to this call, although it is difficult to determine the degree to which they would have participated anyway in supporting local Conservative party candidates. Some idea of the extent of this mobilisation can be gained from a report in *The Imp* of the work done by members in one Division during the campaign (Table 9).

⁵¹ *The Times*, 2 June 1930.

⁵² *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 7.

⁵³ *The Birmingham Mail*, reprinted in *The Imp*, 5 (April 1930), 12.

⁵⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (May 1929), 3.

Table 9. Voluntary work done by League members during the 1929 general election campaign in one (unidentified) Division⁵⁵

Activity	Number of members involved
Private secretary to candidate	1
Aide-de-camp to candidate	1
Whole time voluntary clerk	2
Sub Agents	1
Speakers	5
Canvassing	30
Clerk tellers at polling stations	59
Clerical work	152
Distributing literature	137
Lending a conveyance	25
Driving a motor car	28
Messengers: General	72
Messengers: Cyclists	36
Messengers: Motor Cyclists	18
Shorthand writer for reporting meetings	15
Stewards at meetings	57

These activities, in total, amount to 639 tasks and even allowing for some individuals performing more than one, show that several hundred League members were working voluntarily for the Conservative party during the campaign. It is likely that the editor of *The Imp* chose to publicise the work of one of the most active divisions and that some were hardly active at all. However, if one assumes an average figure of 250 members in each Division that assisted with the election campaign, and extrapolate this to estimate the total number at work in the 463 League Divisions formed throughout England and Wales (out of a possible total of 507)⁵⁶ it would mean the mobilisation of about 115,000 young people during the campaign. The source of the figures and their anonymity (the Division in question is

⁵⁵ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1929), 6.

⁵⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/9 Annual Report 1929.

not identified in *The Imp*) suggest an element of propaganda, even exaggeration, but they are nevertheless indicative of the extent of one of the League's major activities: helping the senior party to win parliamentary seats. It is important to understand that they show that the Junior Imperial League was a significant force in electioneering in Britain for a period between the wars, a fact that has been ignored by historians. It is comparable in its electoral effectiveness with the Primrose League in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which 'effectively supplemented and sometimes supplanted the [Conservative] party organisation as an election machine'.⁵⁷ The JIL and the Primrose League were not the only imperial activist groups to act in such an extensive and direct way in supporting candidates at parliamentary elections; the BCU selected and financed twenty-four candidates at the 1918 general election. Other groups, however, such as the EIA (and in the 1950s, the LEL, unsuccessfully) sought to recruit existing MPs to their cause. Conversely, the Empire Crusade put up candidates at by-elections in the 1930s to oppose Conservative candidates. The support of actual or potential MPs was important to many imperial activist groups in pursuing their objectives but in the case of the JIL (and the Primrose League) there seems to be a general sense of loyalty to the Conservative party that transcended mere imperial objectives. In reporting the electoral efforts of JIL members, *The Imp* may not have been the creator of exaggeration but merely its willing purveyor. In one division in the south of England,

...the Conservative candidate, who secured a bumper majority, said the backing given by the Imps had made the whole election quite different from any previous contest. "It has been", he said, "like campaigning in heaven".⁵⁸

Whether or not the campaigning was indeed heavenly, it is interesting to consider the mixture of tasks. Only thirty-seven of the activities shown in Table 9 (above) required any political skills: aide de camp, sub-agency work, speaking and canvassing. The remainder were simply clerical or to do with distribution and transport. This does suggest that, at least in this particular division, individual League members were largely used as political cannon-fodder during election

⁵⁷ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 137.

⁵⁸ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1929), 6.

campaigns. One cannot gauge with certainty the extent and impact of the political activities. For example, although there were only five speakers we do not know how many meetings they addressed in this division nor the size of the meetings although in another division 'the Imps were responsible for holding 54 meetings at which 83 speeches were delivered by Imps'.⁵⁹

As we have seen, Bernard Braine and Patricia Hornsby-Smith are good examples of how the League's activities and structures facilitated the rise of young politicians. The hierarchical League organisation, comprising Federations, Divisions and Branches, provided young men and women with an organisational and political escalator on which they could rise to the notice of senior politicians and thus better develop a political career. J.D. Profumo and Roland Cartland are other prominent examples among many who ran for, and were elected to, positions in local or national politics. Perhaps, therefore, those who criticised the mix between social and political activities missed the point. They were not rivals but mutually supportive. The emergence of young politicians who had learned their skills through membership of the League, and the effective mobilisation of many members during election campaigns were valuable outcomes of the League and were not subverted by dances and rambles. Indeed without social activities it is arguable that the League's political side would have been weaker.

Ideology

The League's post-war 'scheme of ideas' can be seen formally in its revised statement of its objects which was prepared in 1920.⁶⁰ The objects were defined as:

To create a practical interest in political work and organisation among young men and women of the Empire...to co-operate with existing Conservative and Unionist bodies, with a view to advancing the cause of Imperial unity, upholding Constitutional Government, and actively furthering the principles of the League throughout the Empire.⁶¹

These words, which remained unmodified throughout the remaining years of the League's existence, are essentially unchanged from those chosen at the very

⁵⁹ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1929), 6.

⁶⁰ Bodn.CPA CCO506/1/2 Publications Committee 26 January 1920.

⁶¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/2 *Handbook for Organisers and Workers* (c.1925).

inception of the League twenty years earlier in 1905. The words addressing its imperial and constitutional aims are the same except that ‘Constitutional Government’ replaces ‘constitutional principles’. More significantly, perhaps, is that ‘furthering the Unionist cause’ is replaced by ‘furthering the principles of the League throughout the Empire’. The word ‘union’ in the Conservative party lexicon was flexible in its meaning and not reserved exclusively for references to the unity of the constituent political nations of the British Isles. For example, in a speech in December 1924, Baldwin defined it as ‘the sense that we stand for the union of those two nations of which Disraeli spoke’.⁶² Its removal from the League’s statement of objects may be interpreted, not as weakening of the League’s Conservatism, but perhaps recognition that the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 finally precluded a united British Isles. Welsh and Scottish nationalism presented no threat to the cohesion of Great Britain. References to the particular union that included Ireland were therefore otiose and in this respect the League was ahead of the main party which did not drop ‘Unionist’ from its title until 1925.⁶³

The Conservative party rarely stated its principles in a formal way⁶⁴ but the League did so in 1921. Its ten principles were laid down by its governing bodies and promulgated to activists.⁶⁵ The three listed first, presumably to establish their priority, were imperial:

1. To maintain our constitutional monarchy and democratic form of government, which secures to the Empire a greater measure of Freedom than enjoyed by any other people.
2. To promote the unity and commercial supremacy of the Empire.
3. To secure the efficient defence of the Empire on sea, in the air, and on land.

These are the principles of Joseph Chamberlain and perceive defence and commerce as imperial matters that were the essential elements of a united British Empire. They raise the question of exactly what is meant by ‘Empire’ because they do not specifically identify particular parts of it. Chamberlain excluded India and the

⁶² Quoted in Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin; Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 224.

⁶³ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*. The honorary secretary of the Midhurst Junior Conservative Association even suggested that ‘Unionist’ in the *senior* party’s name should be replaced by ‘Imperial’ because Ireland had become independent (*The Imp*, 4 (February 1929), 4).

⁶⁴ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/1 *Annual Report 1921*

dependent colonies from his ideas on imperial unity, and it would seem that the League agreed with this approach because imperial references in League discourse in the inter-war years were largely confined to the Dominions and mooted methods of trading with them. Trade with India was never an issue for the League and India only became relevant to League principles when its governance became a controversial issue in the first half of the nineteen-thirties. In the context of Indian governance and the dependent (i.e. directly governed) colonies, the reference to 'Freedom' seems studiously blinkered if those who defined the League's first principle were conscious of the contemporaneous call for self-determination contained in Woodrow Wilson's fourteen principles.

The next six principles referred to 'respect for law and order'; 'the right of everyone to own and manage property'; 'individual liberty'; the promotion of 'co-operation between employers and employed'; 'fight[ing] class warfare'; and the elevation of the 'standard of life' through improvements in health, education and 'industrial ability'. They are national and domestic, not imperial, principles and represent a statement of one-nation toryism. They also have a flavour of social imperialism that is perhaps better captured by Lord Stanley in a speech to five hundred members of the League in 1928. The League, he said, 'stood for the development of the Empire, the strengthening of Empire ties, the defence of the Constitution, and the betterment of social conditions'.⁶⁶ Stanley was not simply ideological in his leadership of the League but also declared the essential and practical purpose of the League to be an effective imperialist force at general elections. Thus the following year, during the election campaign in 1929, *The Imp* told its readers that:

Time and again our chairman, Lord Stanley, has reminded us that the real purpose of the League is to return the largest possible number of Conservative members to the House of Commons. The League of course has other functions; but when we get down to brass tacks *that* is the object--to make sure that the Imperial and Commonwealth cause has its full quota of champions at Westminster.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 1 October 1928.

⁶⁷ *The Imp*, 5 (May 1929), 2.

The final League principle is consistent with this declaration. It reverts to the Empire and aims 'to interest and educate the young men and women of the Empire in political questions of the day and to assist them to take a larger share in public life'.⁶⁸ The outcome of the pursuit of this principle was the League's extensive activities at election time and the increasing number of members who sought election both locally and nationally. Furthermore this principle is, perhaps, the only one in which the League could, through its own efforts in its branches, take direct action. It reiterates the opening declaration in the objects of the League and is arguably the principle which had the most sustained political impact. All the other principles were policies for which it could only campaign and not, of itself, fulfil directly. Arguably the resolutions at conferences and the ensuing debates within the League did little or nothing to influence party policy. The League was not alone in this. At the Annual Conference of the senior organisation, the NUCUA, in 1929, representatives argued that the party leadership openly ignored resolutions passed at annual conferences.⁶⁹ That does not, however, necessarily deflect either body from the issues that concerned them; it merely illustrates their ineffectiveness in changing party policy.

The League's objects and principles were clearly enunciated by its leadership but by their very nature they were expressions of intent to which branches and members were expected to give support. Branches were required to be 'in sympathy'⁷⁰ with them before they were allowed to join or affiliate to the League and, furthermore, individual applicants for membership were expected to sign a declaration:

I desire to become a Member of the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League and I hereby declare that I profess and support the principles of the League and will use my best efforts to forward its objects.⁷¹

Such commitment implied action. The objects and principles remained to be put into practice and one needs to assess the extent to which this occurred. One way of doing so, as suggested earlier, is to examine the topics discussed at annual

⁶⁸ Bodn. CPA CCO506/5/2 *Handbook for Organisers and Workers* (c.1925).

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 22 November 1929.

⁷⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 *How to Form a Branch* Publication Committee May 1920.

⁷¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/2 Executive Committee March 1920.

conferences and the content of speeches by leading members of the party such as Stanley Baldwin, or other notable people such as, for example, Lord Curzon, Lord Derby and Neville Chamberlain. The reactions of members to those addresses help to demonstrate the League's beliefs. Conferences also provide a substantial source of information about members' practical political priorities. In an editorial in 1925 *The Times* commented on the value of the Conservative Party conferences:

The conference always serves a useful purpose in that it enables the party organisers to sound the feeling of Conservatives in the constituencies, and it gives the leader of the party an opportunity to address a gathering fully representative of the whole country.⁷²

The same was true of the League. Several hundred representatives attended its annual conferences to debate, and to vote on, resolutions. An analysis of all the conference resolutions between 1927 and 1939 is shown in Table 10.

⁷² *The Times*, 8 October 1925.

Table 10. An analysis of League Annual Conference resolutions, 1927-1939

Year	Imperial	Foreign affairs	Domestic (Economic)	Domestic (Other)	Other	Internal Admin.	Total
1927	0	0	0	1	1	9	11
1928	0	0	4	2	1	5	12
1929	2	1	1	0	1	5	10
1930	5	0	2	1	1	3	12
1931	2	1	1	1	1	1	7
1932	2	3	4	3	0	4	16
1933	1	2	1	4	0	4	12
1934	5	1	3	2	2	4	17
1935	3	4	1	3	1	4	16
1936	1	1	2	4	1	6	15
1937	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1938	2	2	2	3	1	5	15
1939	0	1	1	1	1	4	8
Totals	23	16	22	25	11	54	151

We are mainly concerned here with the four columns relating to imperial, foreign and domestic political policies. (The column headed ‘Other’ refers to a resolution of congratulation and support for the Conservative party leader. There were two such resolutions in 1934.) In order to assess the validity of these resolutions as evidence of the nature of the League’s ideology, it is important to try to establish how resolutions were placed on the agenda of an annual meeting. There is very little evidence about this but the record of a meeting of the Executive Committee in May 1930 sheds some light on the matter.

[T]he Chairman [Lord Stanley] read [a resolution] regarding the situation in India, which had been submitted by the Twickenham Divisional Council, and said he was of the opinion that it would be very unwise to discuss this at the Annual Meeting. He had been in touch with Mr Evans, the Chairman, and understood that the Divisional Council were agreeable to the resolution being withdrawn...It was agreed that the resolution should be withdrawn....Mr Lane suggested that the resolution of the Twickenham Divisional Council regarding food tariffs, should be taken last [at the Annual Meeting] as he considered it to be a dangerous motion. The Chairman replied that except in

the case of the one on 'India' they had to take any resolutions that were submitted. After further discussion it was decided to place this resolution after that...regarding protective duties.⁷³

We can see here, first, that the leadership of the League is not arbitrarily or autocratically controlling the conference agenda but using persuasion with those who submit resolutions which it considers inimical to the interests of the League and the party. Secondly, because it was not uncommon for annual conferences to run out of time and thus not be able to address later items on the agenda, by managing the position in which resolutions are placed on the agenda, the League's leadership could attempt to curtail debate. However, in this example, the chairman allowed the Twickenham resolution on food tariffs to be placed eighth on an agenda of twelve items, ten of which were discussed. It was fully debated and extensively reported in *The Imp*.⁷⁴ Thirdly, the Chairman's statement that the committee 'had to take any resolutions that were submitted', confirms the open and democratic nature of the annual meetings. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that analysis of the 151 resolutions tabled between 1927 and 1939 is capable of conveying some idea of the political priorities of members in the branches. The analysis concentrates heavily on the content of the resolutions submitted for discussion. Because the information is not always available, it does not comprehensively analyse the debates and whether a resolution was accepted or not. Although this gives an incomplete picture of the League's ideology, it is nevertheless strongly indicative of the issues which were of major interest to the League.

There are a number of broad conclusions that can be drawn from analysing the conference resolutions. First, the League was loyal to the Conservative party leader. At each annual opportunity, with the exception of 1932 and 1933, it expressed its support. Thus for example, in 1930, the resolution that 'this Conference reiterates its unabated confidence in...Stanley Baldwin...as Leader of the Party, and pledges itself to give him continued and undiminished support', was passed 'unanimously and with acclamation'.⁷⁵ This may have particular importance as a display of loyalty because Baldwin had lost the general election in May 1929 and his

⁷³ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/4 Executive Committee May 1930.

⁷⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 7-9.

⁷⁵ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 7.

leadership had come under attack by members of the senior party organisation. At the NUCUA conference six months later the party leadership and organisation were strongly criticised but Sir William Ray and H.G. Williams, both senior and long-standing members of the League, supported the leader and carried the day with Williams expressing a personal view that was cheered by those present. It coincided with the League's principles. 'There was only one way to run a party [he said]. When they had once elected a leader they must back him or sack him'.⁷⁶ The League always backed him.

An important example of the demonstration of this backing and of the League's beliefs and ideology expressed *en masse* can be seen in a rally held at the Albert Hall on 10 March 1928. Its importance derives from its scale, both in terms of the number of members attending (over 8,000) and the presence of more than four hundred MPs, candidates and agents, and the speech made to it by Stanley Baldwin. The chairman of the party, J.C.C. Davidson, and its principal agent, Robert Topping, also attended. It was, according to Lord Plymouth, president of the League, 'by far the greatest meeting ever organised by the League'. Because the Albert Hall was full, arrangements had been made to relay the proceedings to loudspeakers in Hyde Park where thousands more were expected.⁷⁷

The meeting was one of youthful exuberance about the British nation and the leadership of the Tory party. It began with community singing of 'all the old choruses', a rendering of *Land of Hope and Glory*⁷⁸ and a speech by Lord Plymouth referring to the 'spread[ing] amongst [young people of] the spirit of patriotism and loyal citizenship and constitutionalism'.⁷⁹ When Stanley Baldwin arrived, the entire audience rose waving their programmes in organised contingents of red, white and blue in 'a most brilliant effect' and roaring the Imps' Whisper, a concerted shout of 'One, two, three, HI!' that seems to be an almost puerile collective expression of youthful and affectionate greeting of authority. Baldwin's speech was about democracy, duty and service. These were constant themes in Baldwin's politics; he

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 22 November 1929.

⁷⁷ *The Times*, 11 March 1928.

⁷⁸ Two months after the rally, a resolution that *Land of Hope and Glory* be adopted as the League anthem was defeated at the annual conference in May 1928 (*The Imp*, 4 (June 1928), 3.)

⁷⁹ *The Imp*, 4 (April 1928), 3.

frequently referred in his speeches to serving one's country.⁸⁰ The audience cheered these notions as well as references to 'love of home' and patriotism. He made no direct references to the Empire but again caused cheering when he explained that:

Our trust is the trust of our own people, wherever they may be, all over the world...helping hundreds of millions of human beings...to follow the path...which we believe...is...the wisest and...makes for the greatest happiness of the people of the world.

Whilst appealing successfully to the patriotism and sense of imperial duty of those present, Baldwin also emphasised the importance of youth in political activities. Those present would have felt that they had a worthwhile opportunity to contribute to the maintenance of the Conservative cause and that their efforts were valued by the Tory leadership. They showed in their reaction to Baldwin that their beliefs included loyalty, patriotism, duty, service and a sense of Britain's essential importance in world affairs. In his speech, Baldwin raised no controversial issues, made no criticisms, suggested no particular policies; he endeavoured to excite and motivate those present, men and women, to pursue the Tory cause at a time when his party had suffered six by-election defeats in the previous two years and was 'an unhappy party'⁸¹ facing a general election, with an expanded electorate, within eighteen months. Thus, at that time, he probably saw the League primarily as an electoral resource and not as a force for imperial beliefs.

Baldwin spoke to the League on other occasions during his period as party leader between 1923 and 1937, almost the entire period of the League's active existence between the wars. It is interesting to compare his speech in 1928 with that made in May 1924. In this latter speech we can again see the League's strong loyalty to Baldwin. First, he received his invitation to address the League's annual dinner after his defeat at the general election that he had called, in December 1923, on the controversial issue of tariff reform, and yet before his post as leader had subsequently been ratified by the party. Secondly, on his arrival all the nine hundred people present rose and cheered for several minutes.⁸² Unlike his speech in 1928, his references to the Empire were direct, ambitious and bullish. To loud cheers he

⁸⁰ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 213.

⁸¹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940*, pp. 288-290.

⁸² *The Times*, 5 May 1924.

declared that the League was ‘not afraid of the word “Empire”’. The Empire, he said to further cheers, had not been won by military conquest, although the services had played a part, but by ‘the bone and sinew of our people’. India, he said, had become part of the Empire through trade, and the Dominions because of emigration. His specific geographical references excluded the dependent colonies and he was thus in accord with the League in his understanding of what Empire meant. References to ‘the Empire’ often meant only India and the Dominions, an important definition to bear in mind when attempting to assess the nature of the League’s imperialism. It was the terms of trading with the Dominions and the governance of India that dominated imperial discourse in the nineteen-thirties and in which the League participated. Baldwin referred to his ambition that one day there would be free movement within the Empire just as there now was in the United States. Many years ago the creation of the United States had not seemed possible, he said, but it had happened. In the same way, although a United Empire had not yet been achieved, the enthusiasm of the youth of today was capable bringing it about. This was greeted with loud cheers.

These two speeches were made in a period in which India and the Dominions were seeking increasing formal independence of action for themselves. The Imperial Conference in 1926 had declared Britain and the Dominions to be equal and autonomous; and Indian nationalism was being addressed by the British government through the Simon Commission set up in 1927. In 1930 Nehru declared the independence of India; in 1931 the Statute of Westminster was signed; in 1935 the Government of India Bill became law. Although these events were all in the future when Baldwin made the speeches that have been discussed, they were in train and so may help to explain the dilution of his imperial rhetoric in front of the Junior Imperial League in 1928. This decline in the salience of imperial affairs continued in the nineteen-thirties. By 1938 a group comprised of candidates, party agents, lawyers, journalists...and many others, some of whom were League members, met over a weekend at Ashridge to discuss imperial affairs. They concluded that there was ‘a serious lack of interest shown today by the people of Great Britain in the

problems of the Empire'.⁸³ This trend is also indicated by examining the resolutions on imperial matters that were put to the League's annual conferences.

At annual conferences, the resolutions gave approximately equal attention to domestic and overseas affairs and, within the former, to economic and non-economic issues. Domestic non-economic issues were largely concerned with issues of governance such as House of Lords reform; with electoral questions such as votes for women; and with countering socialism and communism. Economic issues emphasised support and protection that had an imperial flavour, for industry and agriculture. Unemployment was also a recurrent issue, especially in the nineteen-thirties. Thus an important characteristic of domestic issues was that they did not resonate with the League's fourth to ninth principles described above. Law and order; property rights; personal liberty; industrial relations; class warfare; health and education did not preoccupy the collective consciousness of the Junior Imperial League at its annual conferences. In domestic politics its ideology was not linked rigidly to a set of formal principles. It was pragmatic and alert to the issues of the day that interested members in the branches. Within that context, its 'systematic scheme of ideas' was to admire and support the party leadership and to work to bring about, or sustain, a Tory administration.

The League's political themes in imperial and foreign affairs were more determined and persistent. The imperial issues that interested the annual conferences can be divided into three categories: trade, defence and India. All three were encapsulated in the desire to preserve and integrate the British Empire. The League's debates about the Empire reached an apotheosis at the conference in 1930. In addition to a motion of confidence in Baldwin, nine resolutions were debated: two concerned internal administrative arrangements and seven addressed political policy. The general theme of these political resolutions was economic and imperial. Within the wording of the resolutions, appreciation was expressed about Baldwin's imperial policy which had advanced the idea of Imperial Economic Unity; his proposal for a Dominions conference to deal with protection of home-produced wheat and meat was welcomed; protective duties against foreigners were recommended so as to

⁸³ *Torchbearer*, 2 (March 1928), 32.

rationalise 'Industry and Agriculture in the Empire'; food tariffs were 'desirable' in order to bring 'Imperial Economic Unity into being'. A final resolution stated that 'no avowed supporter of Free Trade shall occupy any position such as Parliamentary Candidate or any official positions within local associations'.⁸⁴ All these resolutions were carried and show that many members of the League believed strongly that the solution to Britain's domestic economic problems lay in closer unity of the Empire; foreign, that is non-imperial, trade was seen as a threat. The Conference thus issued a clear message of support for economic imperialism of a type that had its origins in the idea of imperial unity that emerged strongly in the 1880s and the debate about tariff reform in the early years of the twentieth century. Its place in the ideology of Conservatism in 1930 is important and is discussed later in this chapter.

How imperialist was the League? The sources do not suggest that it was obsessed with empire but it did support imperialism, especially in relation to the Dominions and India. It may be that Empire was so embedded in League members' thinking that it became commonplace and a received wisdom to which one did not need often to refer. Nevertheless the League strongly supported imperial preference and saw the Empire as a means of solving unemployment in Britain by trade and emigration. The League admired imperialists such as Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Bryant, invited Leopold Amery to address its annual dinner, considered, but rejected, using *Land of Hope and Glory* as its anthem and owed its founding inspiration, in part, to Joseph Chamberlain.⁸⁵ In 1929, at its annual conference it called upon the leadership of the party to 'adopt an imperial policy of a bolder nature' in order to 'bring about a closer...unity between the constituent parts of the Empire'.⁸⁶ At that time, at least, the League wanted to make the Conservative party more imperialist and yet it was oddly passive about the mechanics of its imperialism. There is no evidence that it ever sought to set up branches in the Empire in spite of that being stated as one of its objectives, and it was weakly responsive to the few approaches from the Dominions for assistance in copying the League, for example in Canada. Certainly interest in imperial affairs grew then waned at annual conferences in the nineteen-thirties. In 1929 there were two resolutions; in 1930, five; in 1931, two; in

⁸⁴ *The Imp*, 5 (July 1930), 7-9.

⁸⁵ *The Imp*, 5 (March 1930), 5.

⁸⁶ *The Times*, 4 November 1929.

1932, two; in 1933, one; in 1933, one; in 1935, five. In the four years 1936 to 1939, only four resolutions were put to the conference (see Table 10).

One has the impression that the League transformed itself from an institution that initially sought primarily to fight directly for the Empire and the constitution, into one that was principally an electoral resource and a training ground for young politicians and in which empire, though salient, was not always paramount. In practice this was its most effective way of pursuing its imperialism. Rather than merely theorise about imperial issues, it sought to be effective by helping to secure the election of Tory representatives of pro-imperial issues to the House of Commons. Certainly it was easier for members to act locally in practical ways, for example in Empire Day celebrations, than it was to engage directly with distant parts of the Empire. The League experienced its relatively weak practical imperialism vicariously through those who sat in parliament, and its stronger theoretical imperialism through its debates and conferences. Unlike the JIL, almost all imperial activist groups such as the Imperial Federation League, the Imperial Federation (Defence) League, the Tariff Reform League and the United Empire Trade League were, for example, concentrated persistently and exclusively on imperial affairs; achieving their particular objectives in either imperial governance, defence or trade was their principal aim. Others, later in the twentieth century, such as the Empire Industries Association and the India Defence League concentrated, respectively, on trade relations and opposing Indian self-government. One might say that attempting to change some aspect of the affairs of the Empire was their full-time purpose. The JIL, however, whilst loyal to the Empire, turned its attention more strongly to particular imperial affairs largely at times when taking up a topical issue. Thus, its particular, but relatively transient, interests in the Empire centred, in the 1930s, on trade relations with the Dominions and on the governance of India and it is these matters that illustrate an important aspect of the nature of the League's Conservatism which has its origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before considering them in more detail, however, it is important to consider the roots of the League's imperialism.

The League was founded in the same period during which a number of other imperial activist groups were extant, such as the Royal Colonial Institute, the

Primrose League, The Imperial South African Association, the British Empire League, the Victoria League, the League of Empire, the Empire Day Movement, and the Tariff Reform League, all described in Chapter 1. Additionally, quasi-Tory leagues also appeared in the early years of the twentieth century, including the British Constitutional Association, the Navy League, the Imperial Maritime League, the National Service League [and] the Middle Class Defence League'.⁸⁷ The names of these organisations capture the political questions that engaged Tory activists at that time: 'anti-socialist', 'tariff reform', 'constitution', 'navy', 'imperial', 'national' and 'middle-class'. The vocabulary of the contemporary Tory discourse of activists who sought to further aspects of toryism emphasised preservation and development rather than radical change. Thus, for example, the Navy League was determined that 'the command of the sea was the primary object of national policy' and the Tariff Reform League sought 'to consolidate and develop the resources of the Empire'⁸⁸ although introducing tariffs was seen by some Tories (and Liberals) to be counter to traditional Tory beliefs in free trade. (We can contrast these preservationist principles with the socialist Fabian Society whose radical aim was to 'further the reconstruction of society'.) The League's full name, the Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, thus drew on the contemporary Conservative terminology and its ideology rested on what the philosopher Ted Honderich has called 'reform', not 'change'. The former, he argues, alters what is not fundamental about political, social or economic circumstances whereas the latter changes their foundations.⁸⁹ The League, insofar as can be seen from the resolutions debated at its meetings, proposed no fundamental concepts. It sought reform, not change, and sometimes resisted even reform, as in the case of the governance of India.

The League's most persistent and sustained belief was in the use and preservation of the Empire, which by implication, they defined as the Dominions and India. The dependent colonies were never an expressed part of the League's interests. One can speculate that this may be because, generally, their governance was stable and unlikely to change at least until 1936 when the transfer of African colonies to Germany was mooted bringing an adamant response from the League

⁸⁷ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p. 7.

⁸⁸ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p. 40.

⁸⁹ T. Honderich, *Conservatism* (London, 1990), p. 5.

rejecting such a notion.⁹⁰ The League's imperial ideology had its roots in Disraeli's belief in the Empire that he had expressed in his Crystal Palace speech in 1872 and which was referred to by Neville Chamberlain as still relevant when he spoke to the League at their huge rally and inaugural sports meeting at the same venue in 1930.

I want to take you back to the past ...[to] this same Crystal Palace, 60 years ago...[when] Disraeli made one of his most celebrated speeches. It is astonishing to realise how much of that speech was appropriate to these modern times.

This was an expression of the continuity of the Conservative party's belief in the Empire and an endorsement of Baldwin's compliment to the League in a speech in 1924 when he declared that the League was not afraid of the word 'Empire'. In all the activities and of the League, social or political, it is the word that emerges most strongly either directly or more subtly. Over the years several attempts were made to remove 'imperial' from the League's title but they never succeeded. It would be wrong to assume that the membership of the League was uniformly enthusiastic about the Empire but those who were enthusiastic about it held sway, at least in the matter of the identity of the League. And yet in some ways their imperialism was passive. They sought no expansion of membership within the Empire, in spite of this being one of their declared aims, unlike several other imperial activist groups. The Primrose League, for example, had habitations (branches) in several countries of the Empire, especially those to which British people had emigrated;⁹¹ the Victoria League had associated organisations in Canada and South Africa; and for the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, the Overseas Club and the Empire Parliamentary Association, overseas membership was the essence of their purpose. Nor is there evidence of formal contact between the League and those living in the Empire throughout the world. This may be because the activities of the League were heavily based on individual branches and thus reinforced their parochialism. Certainly there were centralised events but even here the agenda was often heavily accommodating to the branches and not to central direction or control. The League's imperialism was thus diminished and focused on trade with the Dominions, usually for domestic economic benefit and for greater imperial unity, and on the governance

⁹⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/15 Annual Conference May 1936.

⁹¹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 90

of India. These important issues defined its range and illustrate the nature of the League's Conservatism. But in what ways did the League's beliefs relate to Conservative ideology and what was the context of the League's debates about the Empire in the nineteen-thirties? To answer these questions we need first to look, very briefly, at some of the historiography of Conservative ideology in the inter-war years.

There have been attempts by historians such as Honderich, O'Sullivan, Jarvis⁹², Barnes and Green to analyse and define the elusive nature of Conservative ideology. However, no narrow consensus has been reached and conclusions sometimes seem contradictory. Thus, for example, John Barnes asserts that 'Conservatives feel that ideology at best is an inadequate guide to political practice'⁹³ whereas Ewen Green states that '[i]deology...is central to the history of the Conservative Party'.⁹⁴ Whichever of these two statements one prefers, it is undoubtedly true that the Conservative Party concerned itself with certain core beliefs and policies in addressing the social, political and economic issues that it encountered. We should, perhaps, therefore, be more concerned with the manifestations of Tory policies, the concrete outcomes of their decisions, rather than with any attempt to define an abstract ideological framework into which all policies, in theory, should be located. These policies of the Conservatives were rooted in their political stance as the party of property and of business and its consequent opposition to socialism. They also recognised the vital need to persuade a new, expanding electorate to vote for it. It was also the party of Empire⁹⁵ and it is on the practical aspect of Conservatism that the following discussion concentrates rather than the various abstract frameworks, or interpretations, of Conservatism that have, for example, been defined by one historian as: an 'aristocratic ideology'; 'political pragmatism'; 'non-utopian'; 'a disposition of habit or mind'; 'unequivocal[ly] ideological'.⁹⁶ Another describes the key elements of Conservatism as 'intellectual

⁹² Ted Honderich, *Conservatism* (London, 1990) p. 213; Noël O'Sullivan, *Conservatism* (London, 1976), pp. 9-25; David Jarvis, 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', *The English Historical Review*, 440 (1996) pp. 59-84.

⁹³ John Barnes, 'Ideology and Factions', in *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900*, ed. by Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (Oxford, 1994), pp. 315-346 (p. 318).

⁹⁴ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p. 14.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 56-58.

imperfection'; 'political scepticism'; 'traditionalism'; and 'organicism'.⁹⁷ By setting these abstract ideas aside for the purposes of this discussion it is not intended to impugn their validity but rather to take an alternative approach and consider actual aspects of Tory policy, in the first half of the twentieth century, and the participation of the Junior Imperial League in debates about them. The necessity of this arises partly because of the League's records that are available: speeches, debates and publications provide quotidian data but no member of the League appears to have left a written discussion of the League's ideology. In the inter-war years one of the most important and enduring of these debates was about tariffs and imperial preference and it provides a case study of the League's ideology in practice. (A second example, not discussed here, is the governance of India.)

The contentious question of international trade policy especially in relation to the Empire was one that had created divisions in the Conservative party from 1903 until the nineteen-thirties and was responsible for their electoral defeats in 1906 and 1923. In 1929 the general election was fought by the Conservatives largely on the themes of unemployment and Baldwin's reputation. Imperial trade policy did not contribute to the Conservative defeat that year but it soon came to the forefront in debates about how the party could regain power. For example, some constituency associations believed that that had insufficient say in determining party policy and that 'the Conservatives could only hope to return to power by advocating a sweeping policy of extension of safeguarding and the development of the Empire'.⁹⁸ The debate about the best way to protect British industry and agriculture, whilst at the same time reinforcing the commercial unity of the Empire, was reactivated. Broadly, one can define the three factions within the Conservative party into those, such as Salisbury, Derby and Churchill, who were free traders opposed to imperial tariffs; at the other extreme, the tariff reformers, such as Neville Chamberlain and Leo Amery, who believed in food taxes on foreign, that is to say, non-imperial, imports; and a central group, including Baldwin, who sought a compromise solution based on import duties that would safeguard industry. The forceful intrusion of Lord

⁹⁷ A. Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection* (London, 1978), quoted in Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p. 281.

⁹⁸ Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party* (New Haven and London, 1988), p. 35.

Beaverbrook, a man of intensely imperialist sentiment, into this situation exacerbated differences within the party.

Beaverbrook used his newspapers to spread propaganda in support of his Empire Free Trade policy whilst at the same time seeking to draw Conservative MPs to his cause.⁹⁹ Empire Free Trade meant the creation of an economic bloc comprising Britain, its colonies and the Dominions. The bloc would raise high trade barriers to those countries outside it whilst giving preference to those within it. An essential element of the implementation of the scheme was the introduction of food taxes, a policy that was seen by many Conservatives to be anathema to electoral success, as had been the case in 1906. Beaverbrook's campaign raised the intensity of the debate within the Conservative party about foreign trade. At the NUCA annual conference in November 1929 debates about 'safeguarding, tariffs and the empire' were a major part of the agenda. The conference wanted a bolder policy than Baldwin's 'median position'.¹⁰⁰ The Junior Imperial League was in agreement with the senior body. It had held its annual conference earlier in November and had called for a 'closer industrial and commercial union between the constituent parts of the Empire' and for imperial preference as a solution to the unemployment problem. Thus both organisations were drawn towards Beaverbrook's trade policy. In the case of the Junior Imperial League this was made fully explicit at a meeting of its Council in February 1930. The League, with only two dissenting votes, 'strongly urge[d] the Conservative party to adopt a policy of Empire Free Trade'. Such a policy was far more imperialistic than that of the party leadership and had been voted through by the Council in spite of a warning from one of the League's vice-chairmen, H.G. Williams, that it 'would constitute a vote of censure on Mr Baldwin'.¹⁰¹

Stuart Ball is right to suggest that '[t]he vitality of [Beaverbrook's] campaign was...making a strong appeal to the younger generation' of the Conservative party,¹⁰² but there was rivalry between the League and Beaverbrook's new political party, the United Empire Party, founded in February 1930. At its annual conference in July 1930, the League passed a resolution attacking Beaverbrook for trying to

⁹⁹ Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰¹ Bodn. CPA CCO506/1/4 Council Meeting 8 February 1930.

¹⁰² Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, p. 55.

‘represent to the Country that the Junior section of his party as the Party of Youth’. The resolution called for the League to ‘assert its supremacy’ as the leading political youth organisation and to rebuff Beaverbrook’s attempts to recruit to the United Empire party, members of the League.¹⁰³ This did not, however, mean the League rejected Beaverbrook’s Empire Free Trade. As already seen, the conference also passed resolutions supporting imperial preference and food taxes and rejecting supporters of free trade within the party. The League’s stance in 1929 and 1930 was at odds with the party leadership and more towards the diehard wing of the party. Its beliefs resonated with the arguments of Joseph Chamberlain whose campaigning that began in May 1903 had motivated the founders of the League to include the word ‘imperial’ in its name at the founding meeting in 1905. The League was usually strongly loyal to Stanley Baldwin but for a period after the 1929 election it was less so and wittingly or not, it looked back to its earlier, and conflicting, loyalty to Chamberlain and the Empire. Putting Empire before loyalty to Baldwin emerged again in May 1933 when the League passed a resolution at its annual conference that opposed the policy on India of the National Government led by Baldwin.¹⁰⁴ Its proposer, Randolph Churchill, argued that it was the responsibility of the League ‘to recall their leaders to their ...proper path of duty. It was more important to save our Indian Empire than to save the National Government.’¹⁰⁵

In what other ways did the League relate to the Conservative Party and to Conservatism? Since its inception in 1906, the League had always been intimately associated with the Conservative party and yet the two organisations were not fully integrated until 1938. Until then their relationship had been ambiguous, even confused, as can be seen from the following examples. At a meeting of the Central Council of the League in February 1930, the Chairman had declared that, although the League had representatives on the Council and Executive of the Conservative Party, the two organisations were ‘definitely independent bodies’.¹⁰⁶ This view was contradicted later that year at a League rally at Crystal Palace, when Lord Stanley observed that the League was a ‘party of youth within the ranks of the Conservative

¹⁰³ *The Imp*, 5, (July 1930) 7.

¹⁰⁴ Bodn. CPA CCO506/2/12

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 8 May 1933.

¹⁰⁶ *The Imp*, 5 (March 1930) 5.

Party' and not working merely on its own behalf.¹⁰⁷ Earlier, in 1925, the League's Chief Organising Officer, Capt. A.G. Mitchell, described the League as 'the official junior organisation of the Conservative and Unionist party' and reinforced this view by recommending that the local party agent be used in the process of setting up a new JIL branch.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of the changing nature of its independence from, or integration with, the Conservative party, it is clear that the League was a Conservative body throughout its existence.

Impact

Speaking at a conference of Eastern Area of the League in September 1928, its chairman, Lord Stanley, enunciated, once again, Disraeli's Crystal Palace principles of maintaining the institutions of the country; upholding the Empire; and elevating the condition of the people. In doing so, he was clear about the impact of the League.

It was a movement that would affect the future, not only of the Conservative Party, but of the nation and the Empire. The League took the place of the school, college, regiment, and university of more fortunate people. It was a great national movement...[that] stood for the development of the Empire, the strengthening of Empire ties, the defence of the Constitution and the betterment of social conditions.¹⁰⁹

It would be wrong to take at face value this statement of the League's importance. It was made by the League's principal public figure for consumption not only by those present but also by the national press. It was exaggerated, rhetorical and intended to motivate young members and to impress the wider public but it provides a valid framework with which to assess the League's impact in the terms used by its leadership. What impact did the League have on the party, the nation and the Empire? And in what ways did it stand for the Empire, the Constitution and better social conditions? Was it a surrogate means of educating young people? The answers to these questions lie in an assessment of the League's activities.

¹⁰⁷ *The Imp*, 5, (October 1930) 6.

¹⁰⁸ *The Imp*, 1 (May 1925) 3

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 1 October 1928.

The League's impact on the Conservative party is perhaps the area in which it was most effective. First, it provided a mechanism for young, politically ambitious men and women to learn about politics and to acquire political skills in a way that was readily available to them via a widespread network of local branches whose annual membership subscription cost little. Almost every constituency in England had a branch as well as many in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The League's hierarchical structure of branch, division and area offered members a progressive means of pursuing politics and of coming to the attention of more senior figures in the party. Many members became Conservative candidates in local and parliamentary elections, a proportion of them successfully so. Others became party agents. Stanley's remark about the League being an institute of learning relates to an important activity of the League: the inculcation of political ideas and skills. In the branches the debates held and the talks given by visiting politicians provided an opportunity for young people to discover and explore Tory politics. Speaking competitions organised on a regional and national basis were an incentive for the politically ambitious to acquire and demonstrate political ability and to come to the attention of senior politicians.

Stanley's reference to the educational role of the League is further exemplified by the access that members had to courses at Ashridge and at its predecessor, the Philip Stott College. One should not, however, exaggerate the educational impact of the League. Many members were primarily interested in social rather than political activities and, even at its peak of a quarter of a million, the League's membership was only a very small fraction of the national cohort of people between the ages of fourteen and thirty. Nevertheless as an organisation wishing to spread political knowledge and Conservative ideas and to find and develop young politicians, the League was effective even if its impact cannot be exactly quantified. The League provided a way into politics especially for men and women lower down the social scale who lacked the political connections, through family and society, that aristocratic and upper-middle class men and women often enjoyed. The discussion of emerging young politicians in the section on the League's activities illustrates this.

The League was an effective and disciplined electoral force. Party candidates were energetically assisted at the time of local and parliamentary elections by an army of young people, estimated, as we have seen, at over one hundred thousand during the general election campaign of 1929, for example. One cannot quantify the impact of this electoral force in terms of seats won that might otherwise have been lost, but the impact of the League in elections was immediate and direct and expressions of gratitude from candidates and party agents were common throughout the inter-war period. There are no reports of members of the League using violent or intimidatory methods during campaigning, or at any other time. They were an exemplar of the moderation which mainstream politicians sought to engender in British politics in the inter-war period, even though youth culture was not without its violent elements. They accepted the ethos of their leader, Stanley Baldwin, who 'sought to embed the ideas of reasonableness and peaceableness into the national psyche'.¹¹⁰

In the field of policy any impact on the party was weak. The League expressed its ideas at conferences and through resolutions passed at meetings of its various constituent bodies which were then forwarded to the Council or Executive Committee. Sometimes a resolution was sent to party headquarters. None of this, however, seems to have brought about change in Conservative policy. In any case the League hardly ever took a position at variance with mainstream party policy although its resistance to the progress towards Indian self-government is an exception to this. The League leadership was wary of being at variance with the main party and sought to avoid any embarrassing resolutions or confrontations. Even if the League had been a vociferous element at the fringes of party policy as either a radical or die-hard element, it is doubtful if the party leadership would have taken serious notice. The senior body, the National Union of Conservative Associations, complained that its resolutions were ignored by party headquarters so the youth organisation cannot be expected to have done better. It follows that if the League had little impact on the Conservative party, which was in government for most of the inter-war years and capable of passing laws, then it could not have had any effect on national and imperial policies except by taking some form of direct action that by-

¹¹⁰ Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (September 2003), 557-589 (p. 561, p. 588).

passed the Conservative party. The League never did so; it was not a militant organisation, unlike the League of Empire Loyalists, and never sought publicity for its beliefs through activities such as marches, mass demonstrations and disruptive behaviour. Nevertheless, because of its electoral activities and its production of candidates, Lord Stanley was right to claim that the League had an effect on the Tory party, but his claim about the nation and the Empire is far-fetched.

The League was not strong financially and at least one MP complained that the League would never be a worthwhile force whilst it lacked greater financial strength.¹¹¹ The League's financial resources were both central and local. As long as a branch followed the League's objects and principles, it was free to set its own agenda of political and social activities and to manage its own finances. Apart from subscriptions, money was raised through surpluses made at events organised by the branches. Centrally, there was a separate budget used to pay for a small staff and for office administration and publicity using a grant made to the League from Conservative Central Office to cover these costs. Thus the League, neither centrally nor in its branches, ever had large sums of money with which to campaign for new members or publicise its beliefs and activities to the public at large. Indeed the central management of the League does not seem to have been interested in providing a national driving force for such purposes, even on one occasion suggesting that it did not need all the money offered to it by Central Office. A reason for this financial temperance may be that the League's effectiveness lay in its human, not financial, resources, especially, for example, at election times when as unpaid volunteers they could help the local party organisation by replacing the paid canvassers that parliament had made illegal in 1883.

It may well be that the lack of impact of the League on national consciousness arose, not from lack of financial resources, but from the perception of its leadership, and that of the Conservative party, of what the League was for. If it was primarily a means of educating young people in Tory politics some of whom would become candidates and agents, and of creating and maintaining a resource to be used at elections, this could be done almost entirely at a local level and so there

¹¹¹ Stuart Ball, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: the Headlam Diaries, 1935-1951* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 117.

was no need for strong central resources and direction. The League's headquarters formed a helpful and guiding secretariat rather than a powerful command centre. Indeed, a strong central national force with plenty of funds might have been an embarrassment to the leadership. A resolution at a League meeting contesting party policy was a much safer outcome than a national campaign that opposed the party's policy on India, for example. The League's organisation into many small branches did not facilitate national campaigns. When the branches were formed into divisions and federations this was not to strengthen them but to facilitate communication with them from the League's headquarters. Writing in *Torchbearer* in June 1937, Anne Gill, Honorary Secretary of the Pudsey and Otley Divisional Council, observed that there was a parochial attitude in many branches. They were interested in their own membership numbers, finances and successes but were insufficiently concerned about the activities of other branches even though the League had a hierarchical divisional and federal structure. This parochialism, she argued, meant that League members '[did] not look upon [themselves] as a *national* organisation'.¹¹² Gill's complaint captures the fragmented, parochial nature of the structure and power of the Junior Imperial League but perhaps misses the point that, if the main party saw the League as primarily a mechanism for training young politicians and for marshalling them during election campaigns, a system of disconnected local branches would suffice. It remains to address the questions: why does the Junior Imperial League matter and what does it tell us about Conservatism and the Empire?

Conclusion

Historians have written almost nothing about the Junior Imperial League. Layton-Henry deals briefly with it in introducing an essay on the Young Conservatives from 1945 to 1970 and historians such as Martin Pugh, John Ramsden and Philip Williamson mention it only in passing. Even the diarists and memoirists J.C.C. Davidson, Cuthbert Headlam and Lord Eustace Percy make little or no mention of the League. This might be because of its *relative* importance in Tory politics. In general, in writing about a long career, politicians will conclude that the junior section of any organisation is, by its intrinsic nature, likely to be overshadowed by its senior relation. Nevertheless, some senior Tory politicians

¹¹² *Torchbearer*, 1 (June 1937), 68.

underestimated the value of the League and perceived it as frivolous and too interested in social, rather than political, matters and this may have diverted attention from the League's political value. However, it was a serious political organisation and its importance has been overlooked, and unduly so. Evaluation of the Junior Imperial League adds significantly to knowledge about both the Conservative movement and imperial activism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Junior Imperial League cannot be characterised as an imperial pressure group tightly and persistently focused on a single issue in the way that, for example, the Empire Industries Association and the British Commonwealth Union were. It was a well organised imperial interest group of young Tory-minded people concerned with a wide range of political topics and social and sporting activities. Its impact on policymaking was negligible but it provided a good opportunity for men and women of different social classes to develop their political skills and bring them to the notice of Conservative party officials. It is true that for some members, the League was merely a social club but it could correctly claim to be the largest political youth organisation in the country even though its stated peak membership of 250,000 members is probably exaggerated. Even if only a small proportion of its members were committed to extensive political activity this would still mean that it was of value to Conservatism for very little investment from the main party. The League received little money or other resources from the senior organisation and yet it provided it with thousands of effective men and women during election campaigns. In the 1924 general election, for example, 'many members of parliament cordially admitted that they owed their victory largely to the help of the Imps.'¹¹³ Some members of the League, as we have seen, themselves became members of parliament, and whilst one cannot conclude that this was always solely due to their experience with the League, there are examples, such as Braine and Hornsby-Smith, where it almost certainly was. Members of the League also ran for office in local elections and '[m]any of the most successful constituency agents... gained their knowledge and enthusiasm by an apprenticeship in the Junior Imperial League'.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 6.

¹¹⁴ *The Imp*, 3 (March 1928), 6.

These political successes could not have been achieved, to the extent that they were, without the social and sporting events that all branches organised. They provided an environment in which political awareness, knowledge and skills could be nurtured and electoral activity quickly set in motion. The leaders of the League and the main party were alert to this and saw the benefit to its political cause of sporting and social events and advertised them in their recruiting campaigns. Those who complained about the distraction from politics that social activities caused may have had a point but they did not see clearly enough that the enticement these activities provided was a necessary prelude to the more serious, political, business. Without them many branches would have been much weaker numerically, to the point of closure, and thus cause the loss of a setting in which even a minority could engage in political matters. The opportunity for young people to mix socially also created team spirit and so made them more effective in working together on political issues.

Although the League had little influence on Conservative policymaking, a weakness that it shared with the National Union of Conservative Associations, it sought increasingly to be recognised as a serious organisation and to be allowed to participate fully in the party's senior councils. The Conservative party, which was much more successful in managing and motivating youth than was the Labour party, was sympathetic to this wish and by 1938 the League, whilst retaining its independence, was fully represented on the various administrative bodies of the party structure on a similar footing to that of the men's and women's sections. One might reasonably postulate that Tory youth was at last fully emancipated and that this is recognition of respect and esteem for it in the senior echelons of the party by the end of the nineteen-thirties. Conversely, it might be that by allowing the League an increased presence on its committees the party was bringing the League into party affairs merely to assuage its restlessness about its role and in the belief that it was thus unlikely to be troublesome.

The central management of the League always dealt with the branches, divisions and federations with a light touch. Individual branches, as long as they adhered to the League's principles, were left to manage themselves. As a result of this autonomous structure the League was not usually, except at general election

times perhaps, a tightly cohesive, monolithic force acting on orders issued from the centre. This is in contrast to smaller imperial activist groups such as the Round Table, the Empire Resources Development Committee and the Empire Development Union, for example. It did, however, hold annual general meetings and from, time to time, rallies attended by several thousand members. This enabled them to be addressed by senior members of the party including Stanley Baldwin. Leader and League expressed their mutual admiration on a number of occasions. This loyalty to the leader was one of the defining features of the League and it may help to explain why the League rarely challenged party policy, except notably over imperial issues, and that when it did demur, senior League members sought to temper dissent and avoid embarrassing Baldwin.

The Junior Imperial League and the Conservative party were pragmatic and flexible towards each other and created a feeling of mutual support. They did not adopt a rigid, ideological stance in their relationship (unlike the Labour party and its youth). Each responded to the other's needs: the main party, for example, sought help in election campaigns; the League sought greater political recognition and responsibility. By working together, the Conservative party was better enabled to rise to the challenges of the expanding post-war electorate that brought greatly increased numbers of young men and women to the polling booths of Britain. The Junior Imperial League was a valuable Tory asset and contributed to the advancement of Conservatism in the years between the two wars. It was also a significant presence in imperial activism.

The League was founded at a time when there was a mushrooming of such organisations; several had been founded in the later years of the nineteenth century and yet more appeared during Edwardian times. From the outset the JIL drew inspiration from one of the leading imperialists of the period, Joseph Chamberlain. It created for itself imperial credentials: it chose 'imperial' as part of its name and clung to it throughout its existence; and 'For Empire' was its motto. As we have seen, it was strongly allied with the Conservative party, the party of Empire, and recognised its Disraelian roots as exemplified when Stanley Baldwin referred back to them in a speech to the JIL at a rally in the 1930s. Within the ambit of the Conservative party it could comfortably and loyally express its belief in the British

Empire. It did not often seek to change imperial policy, rather it celebrated and enjoyed Britain's imperial status, accepting the Empire in banal, commonplace ways that took it for granted. In these ways, of all the imperial activist groups, it was most akin to the Primrose League. It was an imperial interest group that was largely inward-looking in the sense that, unlike every other imperial activist group, it appeared uninterested in making strong contacts with people throughout the Empire. This low-key imperialism characterises the League and its position in the spectrum of imperial activist groups will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Epilogue

The outbreak of the Second World War interrupted the League's activities. It stopped publishing its magazine, *Torchbearer*, in July 1939, and suspended indefinitely meetings of its Central Council and Executive Committee in May 1940.

By 1943, however, the Conservative party had turned its attention to its plans for Tory youth in the post-war period. The chairman of the party appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Gerald Palmer MP to 'consider and report as to what action should be taken to re-establish the Junior Movement of the Conservative and Unionist party, with recommendations as to the basis on which it should be organised.... after the war.'¹¹⁵ Palmer reported in June 1944, recommending the complete integration of the League into the National Union.¹¹⁶ In fact it amounted to dissolution of the League and was not without controversy. A number of senior League members such as Herbert Williams, Pat Hornsby-Smith and Derrick Woods, secretary of the East Midlands Federation, objected to the 'somewhat illegal suppression of the League'.¹¹⁷ The League had always been an independent body, not subordinate to the Conservative party and the transfer of the League's funds to the new youth organisation was improper. Woods argued that a meeting of the Executive Committee of the League in 1944 had decided to re-organise the League and change its title but now (November 1945) he wrote, 'I have been informed...that the League is ... defunct'. It was left to Lord Dunglass, chairman of the League, and Anthony Nutting to overcome resistance to the demise of the League. The Junior Imperial and

¹¹⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO 506/4/10 Palmer Committee report.

¹¹⁶ Z. Layton-Henry, 'The Young Conservatives 1945-70', p. 145.

¹¹⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO 3/1/31.

Constitutional League was finally dissolved in 1946 at a meeting of its Executive Committee, to be succeeded by the Young Conservatives.

Chapter 5. The League of Empire Loyalists, 1954-1967

The League of Empire Loyalists was very different from the JIL in several ways. It was at loggerheads with the leadership of the Conservative party, not cooperative with it, as the JIL had been. The JIL drew ever closer to the Conservative party throughout its existence whereas the LEL became estranged from it and lost the support of individual members of the Conservative party. Its purpose was wholly political and without social activity. Its imperialism, which had a virulent element and sought publicity through disruptive tactics, was quite unlike the low-key, celebratory imperialism of the JIL. These contrasting features place the LEL at the opposite end of the spectrum of imperial activism to that of the JIL. It was a persistently controversial organisation both in terms of its membership and activities and in its ideology which some historians have argued was fascist. In the first of two chapters about the League, this chapter will discuss the membership, activities and impact of the League. The next chapter, Chapter 6, will then address the question of the League's ideology.

The membership of the League, it will be argued, in this chapter, had similarities with the right-wing of the Conservative party with whom it sought, but failed, to establish a co-operative relationship. Its activities were carefully planned to achieve maximum publicity but it had little impact on public or governmental opinion. Nevertheless by examining the League, we can draw some conclusions about the nature of British imperialists in the middle of the twentieth century.

The origins of the League, its governance and organisation

The League of Empire Loyalists was officially launched at Caxton Hall, Westminster in October 1954¹ after it had first been mooted by its founder, A.K. Chesterton, seven months earlier in an article in his weekly 'views-letter' *Candour* in which he announced:

The proposal is not to create a new political party, but to organise public opinion so as to force upon existing parties policies favourable to national and imperial survival... Were the [proposed] League... to develop sufficient dynamism at home, its impulses would ... put heart into our kinsmen

¹ *Candour*, 21 October 1954.

overseas and reawaken in them the knowledge that it is a proud thing to be British...[T]he immediate task is...the liberation of the British genius so that it may again assume the leadership of mankind.²

In an earlier piece in *Candour*, Chesterton had argued that forming a new political party was futile; it was influencing public opinion that was essential.

As politicians almost invariably act as politicians...there is no sense in building up another party which...would become just another instrument for the advancement of their own careers. But in so far as they are amenable to currents of opinion...there is surely no reason why we shall not try...to command their obedience by canalising...the public opinion to which they are subject... What is now needed...in an increasingly Jew-dominated world [is] in effect, a Board of Deputies of Native Britons to safeguard British interests...an organisation of British patriots which would [attack] any public man who dared to speak against British sovereignty.³

In eschewing the creation of a political party he was acting in a similar way to almost all imperial activist groups. Only Beaverbrook's group, the Empire Crusade, formed a political party. Other groups, however, such as the British Commonwealth Union and the Empire Industries Association, recruited back-bench Tory MPs to their cause and Chesterton also tried to do so but was unsuccessful.

Chesterton's arguments for the formation of the League establish, from the outset, the matters that were of principal importance to him at that time: 'national and imperial survival', 'kinsmen overseas', 'Britons', 'British sovereignty' and 'British patriots'. These ideas had been familiar to imperial activists since late-Victorian times; the Overseas Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas are particular examples of groups pursuing the notion of kith and kin in the Empire. Chesterton was a British imperial patriot whose Kiplingesque belief was that the British Empire was 'the highest flowering of civilisation'⁴ and whose imperialism was deeply conservative. According to his wife, Doris, his 'attitude [to the Empire] remained frozen in the period 1914-18'.⁵ Forty years later, when the League was founded, Chesterton was pessimistic about the future of the British Empire. It was now threatened by 'the world-wide Dollar Empire' that conspired to 'steal from [the

² *Candour*, 26 March 1954.

³ *Candour*, 19 March 1954.

⁴ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, A12, David Baker interview of Doris Chesterton, 9 May, 1978.

⁵ *ibid.*

historic nations of Europe] the fruits of their long and splendid labours overseas' and so the first words that Chesterton wrote for *Candour*, in October 1953, were: 'The British Empire is disintegrating'.⁶

The League was not Chesterton's first involvement with political movements. He had joined Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in 1933 when, according to his wife, he had been 'in search of a creed'.⁷ Having discovered the BUF almost by chance, Chesterton's commitment to it 'was total from the very outset'.⁸ He rose to become its leading spokesman and subsequently its Director of Publicity and Propaganda and editor of *Blackshirt*. He also wrote Mosley's official biography, *Portrait of a Leader*, published in 1937. By the autumn of that year, however, he had become disillusioned with Mosley's leadership and had decided to resign from the BUF, finally doing so in March 1938.⁹ Chesterton later regretted his association with Mosley and saw it as an 'accursed spectre that haunts me wherever I go'.¹⁰

In 1939, within eighteen months of his resignation, Chesterton was back in the British army in which he had previously served as an officer in the First World War and had won the Military Cross. When Chesterton left the army in 1943 because of ill health, he joined *Truth*, a right-wing journal, as deputy editor and remained so until he left in 1953¹¹ after a disagreement about editorial policy following a change of ownership. Now unemployed, he was acutely aware that his prospects were poor because of his past association with fascism.

In considering his employment prospects, Chesterton saw Beaverbrook's newspapers as the only ones having 'the guts and patriotism to use [his] kind of trenchant attack'¹² and thus promulgate his imperial ideas. In January 1953, he had written directly to Beaverbrook who responded by appointing him for a fixed term

⁶ *Candour*, 30 October 1953.

⁷ David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A. K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, 1996), p. 123.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁰ HLRO, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462, A. K. Chesterton to Lord Beaverbrook, 31 January 1953.

¹¹ Aiden Mackey, *A. K. Chesterton, M.C.* (published 'by his friends and colleagues', undated).

¹² HLRO Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462, A. K. Chesterton to Beaverbrook, 31 January 1953.

from May 1953 until January 1954 to 'engage in such work as [Beaverbrook] may designate for you'.¹³ However, Chesterton's contract was not extended. He had had a difficult relationship with Beaverbrook's editors who appear to have doubted his journalistic abilities and to have been hostile to his political views. Although Beaverbrook expressed his approval for some of the work that Chesterton had done for his newspapers, he declined to overturn his editors' decision not to continue employing Chesterton. Beaverbrook wrote to Chesterton explaining that, 'I cannot run the paper[s] from 3,000 miles distant [in Canada]...responsibility and authority rests with the editors'.¹⁴ Chesterton remained on good terms with Beaverbrook who offered to help Chesterton find new employment as he, Beaverbrook, would 'no doubt be in a position to use some influence' on Chesterton's behalf.¹⁵ Fortunately, however, for Chesterton his new enterprise, *Candour*, was already underway and Chesterton never again needed an employer; *Candour*, his political group the League of Empire Loyalists (and the National Front into which it merged in 1967), occupied his time until his death in 1973. For most of that time he appears to have had no wage or salary but to have 'deducted necessary living expenses' from the capital sums received from a major donor.¹⁶

Although his impecunious circumstances and poor employment prospects caused Chesterton to found *Candour*, he could not have done so without the financial backing of L.K. Jeffery, a wealthy British expatriate living in Chile. Early in 1953, at about the same time as he had approached Beaverbrook, Chesterton wrote a leaflet in which he accused Ronald Staples, the new owner of *Truth*, of betraying its campaign in support of Britain's imperial interests: 'week after week we [who wrote the paper] warned our kith and kin all over the world that our Imperial power...is being deliberately destroyed'. In the closing paragraph Chesterton made a direct appeal for funds: 'The people I wish to reach are [*Truth*'s] readers...if they would be interested in the formation of a company to start another paper, I should be glad to hear from them [by receiving their provisional guarantees of financial

¹³ HLRO Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462, A. G. Millar to A. K. Chesterton, 29 April 1953.

¹⁴ HLRO Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462, Beaverbrook to A. K. Chesterton, 8 December 1953.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, Letter from Chesterton to H. M. Chief Inspector of Taxes, 8 September 1964.

support]’.¹⁷ It is this that is said to have prompted Jeffery to send Chesterton a cheque for £1000¹⁸ ‘with the request that it should be used to launch a newsletter which would express distinctive British attitudes [in] a...world hostile to British power’.¹⁹ The first issue of *Candour*, whose purpose was ‘to try to help in restoring the cohesion and power of the British world’,²⁰ appeared on 30 October 1953 and was the vehicle for the creation of the League the following year. Chesterton saw *Candour* as resonant with *Eye Witness*, a weekly publication edited by his cousin, Cecil, in the early years of the century. Both publications, he believed, demonstrated the importance of ‘the two kinds of courage that have nourished the nation; the courage of the forum and the courage of the field...it seems easier to die in battle than to tell the truth in politics.’²¹ For Kenneth Chesterton, Cecil was ‘the man I must choose as my own exemplar’.²²

Details of the size and manner of distribution of *Candour* are not fully clear. It was a four-page leaflet published weekly (until it ran into financial difficulties in 1961 when it appeared only intermittently) and was registered at the GPO as a newspaper. Its cover price was 1/3d and it was available on subscription at an annual cost of 25s. It is hard to envisage such a flimsy publication available on news-stands or at newsagents and it is probable, therefore, that distribution relied heavily on subscriptions. For example, because Chesterton had been closely associated with the anti-Semitic British People’s Party in the 1930s, helping to define its policies,²³ he was able to take the opportunity, when its right-wing weekly pamphlet, *People’s Post*, ceased publication following the death of the Party’s president, the Duke of Bedford, in 1954, to take over its subscribers. There was also an overseas readership. The mast head of *Candour* declared its availability to Britons overseas, air mail rates were available ‘on application’ and the *South African Observer* frequently reprinted articles from *Candour*.²⁴

¹⁷ A. K. Chesterton, ‘Truth’ Has Been Murdered: *Open Letter to Mr Ronald Staples* (London, undated).

¹⁸ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 196.

¹⁹ *Candour*, 30 October 1953.

²⁰ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E4, A. K. Chesterton v. The North Shore Review, Vancouver 16 February 1955.

²¹ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, B5, G. K. Chesterton quoted in *Blame Not My Lute*.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: a History, 1918-1985* (Oxford, 1987), p. 258.

²⁴ *Wiener Library Bulletin*, VIII (September-December 1954).

The League's organisation demonstrated its imperial ambition by setting up branches in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada as well as in colonies such as Ceylon, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya. Without access to the League's archives, it is not possible to know the number and strength of its branch structure in Britain but the leadership of the League is a little clearer. It consisted of a National Council of about thirty-five people of which more than half were resident in Commonwealth countries, and an annually elected Executive Committee of about fifteen people.²⁵ Chesterton was not Chairman of this latter committee but of the Policy Committee which had powers to prevent subversion of the original objects of the League.²⁶ Undoubtedly Chesterton, 'often...portrayed as the archetypal "authoritarian personality"' ²⁷ wielded considerable power and authority in the League because of this chairmanship, as well as his editorship of *Candour* and his control of Jeffery's contributions, the use of which was entirely at Chesterton's discretion.²⁸ Furthermore, the chairmanship of the League's council was perceived by its incumbent as 'little more than nominal'.²⁹ There is evidence that the League's governance was dominated by Chesterton. Rodney Legg, who was in charge of the subscription list at the time,³⁰ claimed that Chesterton appointed members to committees simply to give an 'appearance of respectability and numbers';³¹ and also in Chesterton's dismissal of the League's Australian National Executive Committee and restructuring of the organisation in New Zealand during visits to those two countries in 1960.³² His senior colleagues certainly recognised Chesterton's autocracy: 'A.K. Chesterton is the *Candour*/League movement', several of them avowed in a circular letter signed by them.³³

²⁵ HLRO Beaverbrook Papers BBK/B/520, M. C. Greene to Arthur Christiansen, 18 May 1956.

²⁶ *Candour*, 26 November 1954.

²⁷ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1995), p. 264.

²⁸ *Candour*, 11 June 1954.

²⁹ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E6, Letter from D Fraser Harris to Chesterton, 20 May 1959.

³⁰ Martin Walker, *The National Front* (London, 1977), p. 31.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 64.

³² *Wiener Library Bulletin*, XIV (1960).

³³ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, Circular letter (undated but c.1962?) signed by Austen Brooks, Frank Clifford, Rosine de Bounevialle, Elizabeth Freeman, David Fraser Harris and Aidan Mackey.

Membership

At the meeting to establish the League, it was agreed that the first task was to recruit members and a target of 20,000 was suggested.³⁴ In fact, during the League's entire existence until 1967, membership never reached more than about 3000, peaking in 1958 and then going into rapid decline³⁵ so that by 1961 it had fallen to about 300 according to Rodney Legg. Even at its peak, the LEL was a small group comparable in size to the United Empire Trade League, the Victoria League and the Indian Empire Society. Chesterton's preference for a select membership helped to ensure that the League was never a mass movement³⁶ and he sought to recruit prestigious people to his cause. For example, in 1957, a direct approach was made to Lord Nuffield. He replied that he 'quite agreed with [the League] but that he was too tired to do any more and that the young people must now take over'. Even without his active involvement in the League 'his name would be a tremendous boost'.³⁷ But what kind of people did join the League?

The names of the leading officials of the League, in its National Council and Executive Committee, were pre-printed on the League's official writing paper and these provide a source, in the absence of access to full membership lists, from which some broad conclusions can be drawn about the sociological nature of the League. (See Appendix 2 for biographical details.). The sixty leading League members listed provide only a very limited source from which to draw sociological conclusions. However, Chesterton was an accomplished propagandist and the names that appeared on League stationery were, in effect, a means of conveying a perception of the nature of the League to its interlocutors. Within this limitation, it is nevertheless possible to see that the League attracted those who tended to be middle or upper-middle class public-school educated people with military backgrounds who had served the interests of Britain and her Empire. In this respect it was similar to the Indian Empire Society and the India Defence League of the 1930s. A second category of member was living in the white Dominions (Australia, New Zealand,

³⁴ *Candour*, 18 June 1954.

³⁵ Neill Nugent, 'Post-war Fascism', in *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain*, ed. by Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow (London, 1980), pp. 205-235 (p. 213).

³⁶ D. S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-1986*, (Manchester, 1987), p. 241.

³⁷ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E5, Letter from Rosine de Bouneville to A. K. Chesterton, 15 November 1957.

Canada and South Africa) or settler colonies such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia. A third category contains professional civilians: journalists, architects and surveyors. There are a few who have made some progress in local politics, but none nationally, perhaps reflecting either Chesterton's cynicism about politicians or parliamentary politicians' reluctance to be openly associated with the League. There are, apparently, no academics or clerics. Not shown in Appendix 2, with the exception of Colin Jordan, (who later joined the National Front) is another type of member, the younger political activist such as John Bean and John Tyndall, but they were impatient with Chesterton's leadership and left to form their own organisations because Chesterton preferred the elitism of the League to their demands for the creation of a mass movement.³⁸ In 1957, for example, Jordan resigned after his proposal to ban Jews and black people from membership was rejected by Chesterton and subsequently formed the racist White Defence League, and Bean left to set up the National Labour Party. The presence of this younger element meant that the League was perceived as a training ground for a post-war 'generation of British fascists and neo-fascists'.³⁹

Despite this transient group of fascists, it is possible to summarise the sociological nature of the League, from very limited membership data, as privately educated; military; conservative, even reactionary; patriotic and imperialistic; and rooted in elitist feelings of 'traditional superiority' and defence of the *status quo*. These are characteristics which can be seen in earlier imperial activist groups especially, for example, the Indian Empire Society and the India Defence League, the only other imperial activist groups whose main purpose was to prevent countries from gaining independence from Britain. Unlike these organisations, however, the LEL lacked a strong element of people who had served in the Empire in military and administrative roles. If League members were conservative, were there sociological similarities with imperialists on the Tory party backbenches? If such similarities can be demonstrated, additional weight may be added to the idea of a class-based British imperialism.

³⁸ Walker, *The National Front*, p. 64.

³⁹ Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur*, p. 241.

By examining Early Day Motions in 1956/7, the authors of *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59* have categorised Conservative backbenchers' attitudes to 'Europe' and 'Commonwealth' into 'two groups: sixty-three "Empire Moderates" and sixty-four "Empire Stalwarts"'.⁴⁰ Of the latter, eight members also rejected any federal relationship with the European Economic Community and may therefore be considered extreme Empire Stalwarts. Apart from Harry Legge-Bourke, Finer and his co-authors do not name these MPs but by analysing the signatories to the original EDM documents I have established their identities (see Appendix 3).

From the biographical details of these eight ultra-imperialists we can deduce that they were public school educated (all eight), went on to further education at university or Sandhurst (five), had imperial or other foreign experience (six) and were either professional soldiers (three) or had conscripted experience of military service (three). It is clear that this group, as with the League, is characterised as middle class, conservative and imperialist, public school educated, military officers. To what extent, however, are these characteristics merely those of Tory MPs in general? To address this question it is useful to look at a group of Tory MPs who did not strongly support the Empire.

In *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59*, the authors have analysed a group of Tory MPs that they call the European Stalwarts. These are twenty-eight MPs who signed EDMs supporting Britain's involvement in the Common Market and who never appended their names to any of the pro-Commonwealth EDMs.⁴¹ Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew found that '[m]embers who entered Parliament in 1950 or before were predominantly Empire-minded' but there was an intake in 1951 of Tory MPs more disposed towards Europe, a change that was 'accentuated in 1955...[Tory] members who won their seats [that year] outnumbered the Empire men by nearly two to one'. It was these younger members who were Pro-Europe whereas 'the over-sixties were over-

⁴⁰ S. E. Finer, H. B. Berrington and D. J. Bartholomew, *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59* (Oxford, 1961), p. 89.

⁴¹ Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew, *Backbench Opinion*, p.187.

whelmingly pro-Commonwealth'.⁴² Finer et al further conclude that differences in occupation of the Empire Stalwarts and the European Stalwarts were 'of minor significance' but do not go into much detail of two important aspects: military and imperial experience. Nor do they identify the MPs by name so that further analysis of the EDMs is necessary to determine exactly who they were. By examining the original nine EDMs (containing several hundred names), I have identified these 28 European Stalwarts and also, from other sources, established their military and imperial experience. The same identification process and analysis have been done for the 63 Empire Stalwarts. The results are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Comparison of military and imperial experience

	Empire Stalwarts	European Stalwarts
Military experience:		
professional career	9.4%	0.0%
non-professional	67.2%	67.9%
none	23.4%	32.1%
Imperial experience:		
extensive	25.0%	14.3%
moderate	17.2%	0.0%
none	57.8%	85.7%

The Empire Stalwarts were more likely to have had experience of the armed services than the European Stalwarts and also to have pursued a *professional* services career. The more striking difference between the two groups is that Empire Stalwarts were three times more likely to have had experience of the British Empire than European Stalwarts. Assessment of the depth and importance of this imperial experience is, to some extent, subjective. It varies from that of Sir David Campbell who was Deputy Chief Secretary in Uganda from 1936 to 1942 and Lieut.-Governor of Malta from 1943 to 1952; of Christopher Armstrong who was with the Burmah Oil Company for twenty years from 1922, in 1942 Controller of the Petroleum Industry in Burma and a member of the Burmese House of Representatives and from

⁴² Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew, *Backbench Opinion*, p. 90.

1944 to 1954 farming in Kenya; to, at the other extreme of experience, Harry Legge-Bourke who was merely aide-de-camp to the British Ambassador in Cairo in 1941-42. Further research is needed to describe more specifically the nature of these individuals' imperial experiences, but it seems clear that those who had experienced the Empire directly were much more likely to champion its cause than those who had not. This finding does not contradict Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew. It extends and reinforces their argument. In describing a stereotypical right-wing Tory MP, they refer to

a belief in the domination of subject peoples, scepticism towards the United Nations, and a vigorous insistence on a firm and independent British foreign policy. These beliefs comprise the right-wing syndrome...of a Conservative party in Parliament, and a fortiori, by fierce majors and tweedy women...in the constituencies⁴³.

We can conclude that Empire Stalwarts are quite clearly distinct from other Tory MPs and have similarities with members of the League of Empire Loyalists.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the significance of this conclusion from such a small sample and from such limited action as merely signing four Early Day Motions. However, Sue Onslow has observed that, '[t]he answer to the erosion of British influence and prestige [in the early nineteen-fifties] was seen to lie in the extension and consolidation of imperial preference [but this was rejected] at the party conference in 1954'.⁴⁴ This rejection caused a cadre of eighteen backbench Conservative MPs to form the Expanding Commonwealth Group (ECG) in order to take more sustained imperial action (See Appendix 4.) Its members were, once again, public schoolboys who had proceeded to university, usually Oxford or Cambridge, and had served as officers in the armed forces. This particular group had a stronger element of aristocracy and, outside their wartime experiences, less colonial experience than the members of the League previously discussed, but they were clearly imperially minded, arguing that the Commonwealth must expand or die and needed to 'develop its resources to match the power of the USA or the USSR',⁴⁵ sentiments with which Chesterton would have strongly agreed. Another feature of the ECG members is that they were almost all born in the fifteen years leading up to

⁴³ Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew, *Backbench Opinion*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Sue Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party and its Influence on British Foreign Policy, 1948-57* (Basingstoke, 1997), p.120.

⁴⁵ HLRO, Biggs-Davison Papers, BD/1/53, *The Broad Concept* (undated but c.1957).

the outbreak of the First World War. Those born then, according to Chesterton, became aware of ‘the splendour and manifest distinctions of European genius...our Imperial destiny, as it seemed to us, was essentially a projection and intensification of this feeling of kinship...’.⁴⁶ The ECG, then, provides further evidence of the sociological similarities of the League and imperialist-minded members of the Conservative Party.

David Cannadine has argued that the governance of British Empire was based on the social structure of the metropole,⁴⁷ and that ‘social ranking’ is important in British attitudes to empire. However, he observes that little consideration has been given by historians to the empire as a social structure ‘in which...[social] status is fundamental’. Britain, he believes, was a social hierarchy whose apex wielded domestic and imperial power.⁴⁸ Even if it is no more than a likelihood that the British people’s various *perceptions* of the empire also arose from their different social positions,⁴⁹ Porter is clear that ‘class was by far the most important factor in influencing people’s attitudes to empire’. The working class showed little interest in empire whereas the education enjoyed by the upper and upper-middle classes meant that they were most supportive of, and affected by, the empire. Furthermore, the predominance of colonial officials educated at public schools lasted until the middle of the twentieth century⁵⁰ and provided a class-based link between Britain and her empire.

The argument that follows in this chapter supports Bernard Porter’s class-based view of empire but I have attempted to provide a more empirical analysis than Porter by examining the social backgrounds of the two groups of people (i.e. members of the League and right-wing Conservative MPs) who are said to have been the only ones who cared strongly about the loss of empire.⁵¹ Thus Porter has a point but does not test it empirically in the post-war period. Nor does he concentrate on the effects of loss of empire on aspects of British identity, merely stating that because

⁴⁶ A. K. Chesterton, *The Word*, 5 Jan 1951, p. 59, quoted in Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 205.

⁴⁷ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London, 2002), p. 69.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

⁴⁹ Marshall, ‘Imperial Britain’, p. 385.

⁵⁰ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 41, pp. 311-318.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 318.

the empire made little impression on British society 'when it was a going concern it follows that its dissolution did not need to have much of an impact either'.⁵²

There is no consensus among historians about the relevance of empire in British society. At one extreme of the debate it has even been suggested that there never was a British empire⁵³ but scholars who have accepted its existence can be broadly divided into two categories: those who see the empire as largely irrelevant to domestic society and those who argue that it had relevance at least to some degree. Further complexity is added to the debate because the perceived importance of empire, both actually and historiographically, has varied over time. Thus John Mackenzie has observed that: '[t]he British, it has often been said, were indifferent to imperialism...apart from a brief [period] ...in the last quarter of the nineteenth century'.⁵⁴ Mackenzie and others in the historiographical debate have sought to reject this idea but recently Bernard Porter has revived it.

Those who emphasise the relevance of empire within this context include Wendy Webster who has argued that, although in mid-twentieth century Britain many people were ignorant of empire, the idea of a 'people's empire' was one of three key media themes of Englishness (often equated with Britishness) that reached its climax in the coronation in 1953.⁵⁵ Weight believes that the mainstays of Britishness in the 1950s were the 'monarchy, Protestantism, democracy and empire',⁵⁶ but that Britain's imperial identity was in rapid decline in the late 1950s.⁵⁷ Paul Ward sees in the break-up of the British Empire the removal of a major element of Britishness. British imperial rule was, he states, probably the most important element of foreigners' perceptions of Britishness but he draws attention to the questioning, by historians, of the extent to which this was shared by the British public. Stuart Ward's discussion of what he refers to as the 'minimal impact thesis' challenges the notion that loss of empire had little effect on British identity.⁵⁸ He

⁵² Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 318.

⁵³ Ged Martin, 'Was There a British Empire', *Historical Journal*, 15 (1972), 562-69.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Stuart Ward, 'Echoes of Empire', *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006), 264-278 (p. 264).

⁵⁵ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-65*, pp.4-8.

⁵⁶ Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940-2000* (London, 2003), p. 12.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 288.

⁵⁸ Stuart Ward, quoted in Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, pp.1-2.

sees the official attempt to define who was and who was not a British subject as holding ‘the key to understanding how end of empire impacted directly on British identity in Britain’.⁵⁹ Bernard Porter, however, is unequivocal. He opines that the British Empire made a ‘superficial...impression on British society and culture’ and that its dissolution ‘did not have...much of an impact’ because British society defined itself in many ways and only a small minority were involved in its imperial polity.⁶⁰

Within the context of Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, what evidence can be suggested in support of the arguments that British imperialism was particularly associated with the upper and upper-middle classes? In other words, who were the imperial British in post-war Britain? One approach would be to examine those known to have opposed the loss of empire and, as Porter has observed, these were only a few ‘Conservative zealots’ and the League of Empire Loyalists.⁶¹ For the purposes of further discussion I shall amalgamate League members, the participants in the Expanding Commonwealth Group and the backbench MPs who signed imperialistic Early Day Motions and refer to them as ‘empire enthusiasts’. Their brief biographical details can be found in the Appendices.

To what social and occupational class(es) did these empire enthusiasts belong? Table 12 shows the education and military experience of the sixty enthusiasts for which (very limited) biographical data is available. This sample comprises thirty-five members of the two principal management bodies of the League (Appendix 2); all eighteen members of the Expanding Commonwealth Group (Appendix 4); and seven ultra-imperialist backbench Tory MPs (Appendix 3). Forty-nine per cent of the empire enthusiasts have at least one of the four attributes shown in Table 12; 20% have two; 25% have three; and 5% all four. Only one has none of the attributes. It would be wrong to draw too firm a conclusion from such a small sample, but one might reasonably conclude that this analysis suggests that there is a positive correlation between the four attributes and enthusiasm for empire.

⁵⁹ Stuart Ward, ‘The End of Empire and the Fate of Britishness’, in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, ed. by Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 242-258 (p. 246).

⁶⁰ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 24, p. 318.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 318.

Table 12. Analysis of educational and military experience of ‘empire enthusiasts’

	Military experience	Attended public school	Attended university	Imperial connection
Number	34	25	17	24
Percentage	56.7	41.7	28.3	40.0

Military service of itself does not necessarily indicate any particular social class, particularly in the 1950s when many men from all parts of society would have served in the Second World War. However, it is a powerful indicator of class in this particular case: all the thirty four men (there are no women) were officers and seven of them were professional servicemen trained at military or naval college. Of the twenty-five who attended public school, seven were at Eton or Harrow and all of the remainder were at leading schools such as Rugby, Marlborough, Stowe and Haileybury. In an age when few went up to university, twelve of the seventeen graduated from Oxford or Cambridge. It is important to note that, of the sixty, only five had close family connections with the peerage. We may reasonably conclude, therefore, that although there was an aristocratic tinge to the imperial enthusiasts, they were predominantly middle and upper middle class. If we accept that, as previously suggested, only the League and right-wing Conservatives were politically active in deploring the loss of empire, we may conclude that this is evidence (but not proof) that suggests that imperial Britishness was *largely* confined to the middle and upper-middle classes. Such a conclusion might be confirmed or modified by, for example, an analysis of attitudes to imperial Britishness among the readership of the *Daily Express*, or of the membership and demise of pro-imperial organisations such as the Royal Colonial Institute and the Empire Day Movement that pre-dated the League; but that is beyond the reach of this thesis.⁶² It is certainly the case, however, that people of all classes belonged to imperial activist groups (about which more in Chapter 7) and it is important to note that the Primrose League and the Women’s

⁶² Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 259.

Guild of Empire had a strong working-class element. It has been said that one can understand the League by looking back to British imperial thinking at the start of the twentieth century.⁶³ Indeed one can see in Chesterton's language of imperialism echoes of Seeley who wrote of a Greater Britain of 'the English (sic) as...one people in a worldwide state'⁶⁴ and of Lord Milner who claimed that 'the Empire is my country'. As one ex-member of the League said of his former colleagues: 'These people have never really believed that Queen Victoria is dead'.⁶⁵

During the thirteen years it existed, the objects and membership of the League were right-wing, conservative and imperialistic. Thus, because, as we shall see, the League had little impact during the thirteen years it existed, it provides useful evidence of the nature of Britishness in the 1950s. It provides strong evidence that only a tiny section of British society felt strongly about empire at that time. That section was from the upper echelons of society that had been privately educated in the early twentieth century, had served its country militarily and wanted to articulate a late expression of imperial Britishness.

Activities and Impact

The activities of the League were designed to acquire publicity for the League's beliefs and policies, and to influence public and political opinion, not just in Britain, but in the white Dominions and some dependent colonies. They included 'stunts' on public occasions and interruptions at other political organisations' meetings; the publication and distribution of *Candour*; attempting to gain the support of Conservative backbench MPs and ordinary Tory branch members; taking part in parliamentary elections; and building a network of useful contacts in the Empire. More opportunistically, the League leadership appears to have relished the opportunity to sue for libel, gaining favourable publicity, and funds from damages, by clearing its name of accusations of violence and fascism. The League's central activity, certainly in its early years, however, was to gain publicity that would convey its existence and message to as wide an audience as possible. It was, to use

⁶³ Robert Pearce, 'Imperial and Commonwealth History', in *Modern British History: a Guide to Study and Research*, ed. by L. J. Butler and Anthony Gorst (London, 1997), pp. 195-206 (p. 202).

⁶⁴ J. H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (London, 1986), p. 191.

⁶⁵ George Thayer, *The British Political Fringe: a Profile* (London, 1965), p. 53.

Joseph Conrad's words, a policy of 'propaganda by deed',⁶⁶ and most of the deeds consisted of interrupting official political meetings especially those of the Conservative Party. One Conservative activist explained to Central office that the League had a 'small "commando" of about fifteen people who attended meetings with the objective of being chucked out', a result for which they were well trained to succeed.⁶⁷ This particular tactic for gaining publicity through local and national newspapers was highly characteristic of the LEL and was not used by other imperial activist groups. Furthermore, groups such as the Primrose League, the Tariff Reform League, the Junior Imperial League and the Empire Industries Association sought to work with the Conservative party and not to attack it.

The League began its publicity seeking activities by demonstrating at the Conservative Party Conference at Blackpool in October 1954. Throughout 1955, apart from demonstrating at a number of meetings during the general election campaigning period and once again at the Conservative Party Conference, it appears to have been largely inactive. In 1956, however, the number and potency of demonstrations increased considerably. For example, in January a member of the League seized the microphone from Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister, at a Conservative Party meeting in Bradford⁶⁸; in March and April the League protested, using loudspeakers, in front of the Soviet leaders, Bulganin and Khrushchev, during their visits to London and Birmingham. The League was adept at gaining entry to meetings of prominent politicians such as David Marshall, Chief Minister of Singapore, (in May) and Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Secretary, (in October).⁶⁹ They did so by obtaining tickets from members of the Young Conservatives or, if unable to do that, by bluffing their way past stewards.⁷⁰ They attempted to buy tickets from delegates to conferences⁷¹ and, on at least one occasion, forged them.

The League's activities continued in similar vein throughout 1957, interrupting Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister, at meetings in March and July and at the Conservative Party Conference in October. At this last incident one of the

⁶⁶ David Reiff, 'Talking with the Jihadists', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2005.

⁶⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Reginald Dorman-Smith to Acting Director General, 15 July 1957.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 19 Jan 1956.

⁶⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/89, *League of Empire Loyalists* (undated, but 1958).

⁷⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Anonymous report, 24 November 1956.

⁷¹ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/92, G. Jolly to C. F. R. Bagnall, 17 October 1958.

League's 'commandos' remarked to a steward as he was removed from the hall that the League members would always be at Tory meetings. The Conservatives were their principal, but not sole, target; for example, a meeting of the Liberal party and two held by the Movement for Colonial Freedom were also disrupted and Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan were heckled at Labour party meetings during the general election campaign in 1959.⁷² The Tories, however, were the principal target and, in all, between October 1954 and December 1957, a Conservative Party report records forty separate demonstrations by League members, of which half were directed against the Conservatives, and also lists thirty-six reports of the events in the national press.⁷³ The League was the only imperial activist group, apart from the Empire Crusade, actively and persistently to confront the Conservative party. Both organisations fought Tory candidates in parliamentary elections but this was a minor activity for the League in comparison to its disruptive tactics. Jon Lawrence has described this kind of activity as the 'politics of disruption' and argues that it was widely accepted in the late nineteenth century in Britain.⁷⁴ It had a violent element to it and 'physical force, and the threat of physical force, was ever present in popular politics before the First World War'⁷⁵ as also were stunts and slogans. It was on the latter that the League concentrated its disruptive efforts; using violence at meetings was not part of its planned purpose. It did, however, receive publicity when violence was used against its members who had disrupted meetings. Its non-violent 'politics of disruption' was not, therefore, fully akin to the Victorian meaning of the expression, but the League made opportunistic use of violence *used against it* to gain publicity and members. Like the suffragettes the League 'sought to exploit the politics of disruption to force their cause onto [the] political agenda'.⁷⁶ They too were the recipients of violence rather than its perpetrators.

As the culmination of a similar stream of activity in 1958, the League reached a peak of publicity at the Tory Conference in October when a number of League members who repeatedly interrupted the proceedings were violently removed from the hall. There was extensive coverage in the national newspapers the

⁷² *Nottingham Evening News*, 28 September 1959; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1959.

⁷³ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/89, *League of Empire Loyalists*.

⁷⁴ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), *passim*.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 188.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 190.

next day and throughout the following week. The League does not appear to have deliberately sought to provoke violence, but it gained publicity by taking legal action against two stewards who, they claimed, had perpetrated the violence. As S.H. Pierssené, a Central Office official, wrote in 1956: 'The League is constantly on the watch to involve us in libel action'.⁷⁷ Others, too, were pursued especially if accusations of racism or unpatriotic behaviour were made. Resort to the courts provided a useful vehicle with which to publicise the League. The League was not unique in this respect. Contemporaneous organisations such as Mosley's Union Movement, the National Socialist Movement and the British National Party 'have been dependent on the provocation of violent clashes and upon court cases for attention'⁷⁸, although Chesterton would have denied that the League ever sought to initiate violence.

The disruptive activities of the League leading up to October 1958 had brought not only publicity but an increase in membership including many Conservatives. Some 'back-bench MPs, rank and file faithful and Party contributors [were] in open sympathy with [the League]'.⁷⁹ Establishing links with a number of back-bench MPs, such as Henry Kerby, and with party officials and Young Conservatives was also an important part of the League's strategy but the League's disruptions had become increasingly irritating to the Conservative leadership and by the end of 1958 it was made clear to members that associating with the League was political suicide. The League's membership began to decline.

As well as the loss of members in the aftermath of the 1958 Conservative Party conference, the League was increasingly seen as anti-Semitic, although Chesterton denied this, and many members decided to resign. The League was also repeatedly fissiparous and by 1959 Richard Hilton, R.C. Gleaves and Peter Godfrey-Bartram had each left to set up their own political parties.⁸⁰ Membership was also affected by defections to Edward Martell's National Fellowship, with its two

⁷⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, S. H. Pierssené to R. Dorman-Smith, 31 October 1956.

⁷⁸ R. J. B. Rose [and others], *Colour and Citizenship: a Report on British Race Relations*, (London, 1969), pp. 394-395.

⁷⁹ Thayer, *The British Political Fringe*, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Thayer, *British Political Fringe*, p. 69.

backbench Conservative MPs on its advisory committee,⁸¹ and to the Monday Club, a right-wing Conservative group founded by four Conservatives in 1961 in response to Harold Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech.

In 1961 the League suffered a major financial crisis when its principal sponsor, R.K. Jeffery, died. He had given the League approximately £70,000 during the seven years from 1954. Chesterton had expected to be the sole beneficiary of his will but it had been amended in favour of another person. Without Jeffery's funding the League had to restrict its activities including the publication of *Candour* which now appeared only at irregular intervals rather than weekly. Fearing for the strength and continuity of the League, by 1966, Chesterton, then aged 67, opened negotiations with the British National Party, the Racial Preservation Society and the Greater Britain Movement. The resultant merger meant the disappearance of the League as a separate entity and its remaining membership of less than two hundred was absorbed into the National Front in January 1967.

Analyses of the impact of the League that have been made by historians and contemporary writers coalesce in the following broad conclusions: the League was adept at gaining publicity for itself; it was a useful training ground for young neo-fascists who went on to form their own political organisations; and its political influence was negligible.⁸² To these may be added that it acted as an important agent in the creation of the National Front in 1967⁸³ and of sustaining a continuing audience of those interested in Chesterton's conspiracy theory of Jewish domination of the world's financial system described in his book *The New Unhappy Lords* (1965).

Beyond this, there has not been much detailed analysis by scholars of the amount of publicity the League obtained nor of the League's effect on the Conservative Party. Addressing these matters in detail is problematical because the

⁸¹ Nicholas Harman, 'Minor Political Parties in Britain' *The Political Quarterly*, 33 (1962), 268-281 (p. 273).

⁸² Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur*, p. 248; Thayer, *British Political Fringe*, p. 59; Walker, *The National Front*, p. 30; Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 197; Nugent, 'Post-war Fascism', p. 213; Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 2000), p. 5; Taper [Bernard Levin], 'Violence at Blackpool', *The Spectator*, 17 October 1958, 553; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 242.

⁸³ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 250.

League's archives and Chesterton's post-war correspondence are largely in private hands⁸⁴ but by examining, for example, the coverage by *The Times* of the League's activities and by referring to internal correspondence within the Conservative Party, some evaluation of the impact of the League can be attempted. Questions such as why so little influence resulted from the League's messages about the British Empire and what conclusions about public interest in the British Empire might be drawn from this failure have also received little consideration.

Publicity in the media was a vital means of conveying to the public the fact of the League's existence and its aims. Chesterton was aware of this and designed the League's activities accordingly. Thus 'stunts', whose targets were prominent persons such as the prime minister, were organised at events at which representatives of the newspapers and television would be certain to be present. The League members would then 'ambush' the event by repeatedly interrupting proceedings, shouting out the League's name and an appropriately provocative slogan. It would be wrong to describe this as heckling because it was carefully planned in advance and did not engage with what the speaker was saying; words were premeditated and not ripostes.⁸⁵ The aim was to create a disturbance and to be thrown out of the meeting⁸⁶ thereby attracting the attention of reporters and cameramen, and through them the general public. For maximum effect they sat apart from each other in the hall in the middle seats of rows and individually and successively interrupted the meeting by typically calling out: 'The League of Empire Loyalists say...' followed by a particular message such as 'Macmillan is a traitor', thus prolonging any action taken by the stewards to remove them. If strong-arm methods were used so much the better because ensuing publicity was more likely.

The importance the League attached to publicity in national newspapers is illustrated by its attitude to Beaverbrook's Express Newspaper group. The *Daily Express* had indeed campaigned in support of the Empire but had failed, to the

⁸⁴ David Baker, the author of *Ideology of Obsession*, has deposited some papers at Bath University but much of the League's archive is probably held by The A. K. Chesterton Trust, Liss, Hampshire. No reply was received to my request to consult it.

⁸⁵ *The Spectator*, 24 October 1958.

⁸⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Dorman-Smith to Acting General Director, 15 July 1957.

frustration of the League, to publicise the League's activities. Why, the League's organising secretary enquired in a letter to Beaverbrook in October 1955, had 'not one line about the League of Empire Loyalists...yet appeared in any of [the Express group newspapers]'⁸⁷ even though almost every other national paper had prominently covered their activities? Beaverbrook should use his newspapers to give 'assistance...in furthering the cause [of Empire]...which you have so often proclaimed to be close to your heart'.⁸⁸ Early in May 1956, the League conducted two days of demonstrations both outside and inside the *Daily Express* building in Fleet Street in an attempt to pressurise Beaverbrook into reporting its activities to 'the middle class Empire-proud Conservatives' who read the *Daily Express*.⁸⁹ The newspaper, however, took no immediate action to comply even though in the following week it launched its campaign to revive interest in Empire Day by distributing hundreds of thousands of Union Jacks to the public at 500 points throughout the country. In editorials and reports of Empire Day activities and reactions to its campaign the *Daily Express* made no reference to the League.⁹⁰

A broader measure of the amount of publicity gained by the League throughout its existence can be gauged by analysing the coverage in *The Times* newspaper, which regarded itself as the paper of record (See Table 13). A comprehensive analysis of newspaper coverage of the League has not been undertaken but, if we accept the data from *The Times* as an indicator of trends in the success of the League, it is clear that its most successful period was between 1955 and 1959 which contained 64% of all reports during its entire existence. After rising quite rapidly from 1955 to 1959, publicity fell from 1960 and by 1965 the League had ceased to be newsworthy. Certainly, it would be wrong to suggest that the 112 news items spread over thirteen years represented an avalanche of publicity but a comparison with news coverage in *The Times* of other, non-regional, minor political groups in the nineteen-fifties and sixties shows the relative success of the League in gaining publicity (See Table 13).

⁸⁷ HLRO, BBK/HIST/184/B/509, M.C.Green to Beaverbrook, 31 Oct 1955.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Daily Express*, 21-26 May 1956.

Table 13. Analysis of news items about the League in *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian*, 1954-67.⁹¹

Figures in brackets refer to the Manchester Guardian

Year	Demonstrations and disruptions	Litigation	Electoral activity	Other	Total	Of which League's name in headline
1954	0	0	0	0	0	0
1955	1	0	0	1	2	0
1956	8 (2)	1	0	3	12 (2)	0
1957	6 (2)	5	4	2	17 (2)	2
1958	12 (6)	3 (4)	0	6 (11)	21(21)	5
1959	10 (2)	8 (2)	3	1	22 (4)	5
1960	6 (1)	2	0	1	9 (1)	2
1961	6 (1)	1	0	4	11(1)	1
1962	6	1	0	0	7	2
1963	0	0	0	2	2	0
1964	3	0	2	1	6	1
1965	0	0	0	0	0	0
1966	0	0	0	0	0	0
1967	0	1	2	0	3	1
Totals	58 (14)	22 (6)	11	21(11)	112(31)	19

⁹¹ Derived from *The Times Digital Archive 1785-1985* and *The Manchester Guardian Index*.

Table 14. Analysis of news items about minor parties in *The Times* 1951-81⁹²

Organisation	Years electorally active	No. of news items in <i>The Times</i>	Years of first and last items	Average items per year
All Party Alliance	1967-68	25	1966-85	1.3
British National Party	1964-66	61	1960-70	5.5
British Empire Party	1951	1	1951	1.0
Fellowship Party	1959-79	12	1963-69	1.7
National Democrat Pty	1964-74	3	1961-69	0.3
National Fellowship	1963-67	31	1956-81	1.9
National Front	1968-79	68	1967-70	17.0
League of Empire Loyalists	1957-64	112	1954-67	8.0

To compensate for the different time periods during which these groups operated, the average items per year have been calculated and show that, on this measure, no other party except the British National Party and the National Front gained publicity similar to or greater than the League. Its propaganda methods therefore were relatively successful within the context of the political fringe of British politics especially in an electoral system which did not give minor parties the encouragement of proportional representation and in which the two main parties were powerfully dominant. In the 1955 General Election their combined share of the votes cast was 96.1%; in 1959, 93.2%; and declining slightly to 87.5% in 1964.⁹³

⁹² Derived from *The Times Digital Archive* and Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, pp.153-154.

⁹³ Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, p. 209.

Chesterton's contempt for political parties and his belief that they all simply became 'tool[s] of the money power'⁹⁴, meant that the League only rarely took part in parliamentary elections. This reluctance to engage in electoral activity was seen as a weakness by the younger members such as John Bean; it meant that opportunities to gain publicity were missed. Fighting elections cost money but when three League officials stood as independent candidates in 1964, to Chesterton's 'delight and surprise'⁹⁵ money to support the campaign was easily raised. The election campaigns of Austen Brooks, Rosine de Bouneville and Leslie Greene, in that year, illustrate the policies of the League. In addition to arguing for the greater cohesion of 'the British nations' and against the loss of individual colonies, there was a racial element.

Rosine de Bouneville had resigned from the Conservative party over Suez in 1956 and joined the Empire Loyalists together with a number of Young Conservative members of the Liss branch. During her campaign at Petersfield, she argued that the colonies 'we have abandoned have been left to terrorists and demagogues. Look at Ghana... You just can't take people from the Stone Age to self-government in no time at all... the Government has scuttled from Kenya absolutely betraying the patriotism of the people there.'⁹⁶ At Streatham, campaigning against Duncan Sandys, Brooks, the son of Collin Brooks, editor of *Truth*, was also openly racist. He wanted 'to keep coloured people out of Britain and supports white government in Africa'.⁹⁷ At East Fife, Leslie Greene, the daughter of Ben Greene, attempted to eschew racism. She wanted 'to urge, with unrelenting determination but without race hatred, the need to protect the European character of the British stock against floods of coloured immigrants' into Britain.⁹⁸ The preservation of the Empire, however, remained the League's priority. The main campaign objectives were 'the preservation, and where necessary the restoration, of the distinctive national sovereignties of the British nations'; 'work[ing] for the preservation and strengthening of the spiritual, economic and military links between the British nations'; and 'resum[ing] imperial responsibilities... towards former colonial

⁹⁴ Rosine de Bouneville, a League official, quoted in Walker, *National Front*, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Walker, *National Front*, p. 48.

⁹⁶ *The Hampshire Herald*, 3 September 1964.

⁹⁷ *The Streatham News*, 4 September 1964.

⁹⁸ *Fife Herald*, 9 September 1964.

peoples' who had been granted independence.⁹⁹ These themes were repeated during the election campaign of 1966. Austen Brooks drafted a letter to be sent to all parliamentary candidates calling on them to 'work for the development of an association of the British nations, to include the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand...Rhodesia and South Africa' and 'to persistently demand the cessation of coloured immigration into the United Kingdom'.¹⁰⁰ The former idea can be traced back to the Imperial Federation League in the 1880s.

The analysis of *The Times*' news coverage clearly shows the falling away of the League's publicity campaign from 1960. The League itself was aware of this; at its Annual General meeting that year, the organising secretary commented that 'we have...hit the big headlines less than in previous years'.¹⁰¹ The reasons for this loss of momentum may lie, paradoxically, in one of the League's major publicity successes, the Conservative Party Conference in 1958, at which several League members were violently removed from the proceedings. This proved to be a turning point for the League as Chesterton recognised when he reviewed progress in September 1960, complaining that many members had 'run away...frightened into retreat after...the savage beating-up of Loyalists by Conservative hoodlums at Blackpool [in 1958]'.¹⁰² Although such a remark may be seen as a self-serving excuse for declining membership, perhaps it was a particular disappointment for Chesterton whose pre-war experience of violent meetings may have caused him to believe that being the recipient of violence was a way of increasing membership. He was present, for example, in 1936 at the BUF meeting at Olympia at which there had been widely reported violence. A police report of the meeting concluded that events there had 'provided an unprecedented fillip to [BUF] recruitment'.¹⁰³ More generally, Stephen Cullen has argued that 'large scale violence at BUF events, usually engineered by anti-fascist opposition, aided BUF recruitment'.¹⁰⁴ This, however, was not the experience of the League at Blackpool in 1958 and there is

⁹⁹ *Fife Herald*, 9 September 1964.

¹⁰⁰ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, letter from Austen Brooks to Chesterton, 11 March 1966.

¹⁰¹ *Candour*, 28 October 1960.

¹⁰² *Candour*, 9 September 1960.

¹⁰³ Martin Pugh, 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate', *Historical Journal*, 41 (June 1998), 529-542 (p. 541).

¹⁰⁴ Stephen M. Cullen, 'Political Violence: the Case of the British Union of Fascists' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (April 1993), 245-267.

evidence that the Conservative party was successful in its intolerance of its members belonging to the League. This outcome is exceptional in the history of imperial activist groups and their relationships with the Conservative party. Many groups, such as the Primrose League and the Junior Imperial League, worked closely with the Conservatives, the self-proclaimed party of Empire; the ERDC claimed 216 backbench Tory MPs as members and the BCU funded parliamentary candidates.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the League had difficulties in putting its case to Conservatives according to Leslie Greene, speaking in 1957 at a debate at Cambridge University Conservative Association.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, Chesterton and the League had a complex relationship with the Conservative party: in public they attacked it to gain publicity; privately they expected a few Tory backbenchers and prospective parliamentary candidates to assist their cause. They also exploited the overlap in the membership of the two organisations by infiltrating the management of the party's local associations. For example, Sir Fergus Graham, a Tory candidate in the 1955 general election, wrote to the Director General at Central Office, Sir Stephen Pierrsené, complaining that: 'I have found that my most...helpful Lieut. in this area [County Borough of Darlington] is a supporter of the League of Empire Loyalists...'.¹⁰⁶ Graham sought advice from central office about 'the full case against the League', suspecting them of being anti-Semitic but Central Office was concerned that any written case would fall into the hands of League members in the Conservative party and afford them the opportunity of legal action.¹⁰⁷ Graham's suspicion of anti-Semitism may have arisen from Chesterton's pre-war membership of the British Union of Fascists when he had attacked Jews 'vigorously and unrelentingly' accusing them of financial greed and treachery.¹⁰⁸

Further evidence of membership of both the party and the League at senior levels in the constituencies is provided by the Secretary and Agent for Cambridgeshire who wrote to Pierrsené: 'We have had some trouble with [the League] locally and one of our Branch Chairmen was an active member...his brother

¹⁰⁵ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, C2.

¹⁰⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO3/4/75, Graham to Pierrsené, 10 May 1955.

¹⁰⁷ Bodn. CPA CCO3/4/75, Graham to Pierrsené, 11 May 1955.

¹⁰⁸ R. Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), p. 343.

is also a member of the League, and a Vice Chairman of the Association'.¹⁰⁹ Nor were junior levels of the Conservative organisation immune. Another senior official wrote to Central Office: 'in Liss [Hampshire, we] have been beset by a plague of 'Empire Loyalists'. They have raped my Young Conservative Branch'.¹¹⁰

The attitude of central office to these infiltrations and dual memberships developed from one of mild disapproval at first, to eventual open hostility. In May 1955, a Conservative official advised Pierrsené 'that many sincere Conservatives are members of the League of Empire Loyalists because of their belief in the Empire' but he was sure that they would nevertheless remain loyal to the party.¹¹¹ However, in late 1956, Pierrsené was noting that: 'This organisation [the League] has been a source of trouble to us for about three years... [Party members] should be strenuously discouraged from having anything to do with it'.¹¹²

By the following summer, the Chief Operating Officer at Central office was responding to a request by the Director General 'to advise him what action, if any, we should be taking regarding the League...e.g. whether we should write round to say that membership of [it] was incompatible with membership of the Conservative Association'.¹¹³ The memorandum argued that the League, although mostly Tory in its membership, was 'deliberately fighting against Conservative [parliamentary] candidates'. Furthermore, the League's interruptions at 'Conservative conferences and meetings...[with their] Empire theme...[appeal] to the young and ex-officers...[t]he League is also proselytizing the Young Conservative movement'¹¹⁴ (perhaps in an attempt to recruit energetic young people to be part of the League's 'commando' designed to disrupt meetings). The memorandum referred to 'a number of the Executive Council of the League of Empire Loyalists [who] are known Conservatives and in some cases officers in their local associations', and concluded that the League's membership was static and that it was having little impact on the Young Conservative movement. Nevertheless the question of dual membership needed to be dealt with but not by its prohibition which would simply give the

¹⁰⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Lewis to Pierrsené, 3 April 1957.

¹¹⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Dorman-Smith to Pierrsené, 24 October 1956.

¹¹¹ Bodn. CPA CCO3/4/75, Adamson to Pierrsené, 11 May 1955.

¹¹² Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Pierrsené to Dorman-Smith, 31 October 1956.

¹¹³ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, C. O. O. to The Chairman, 5 July 1957.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

League publicity. Any written advice to party organisations and constituencies would fall into the hands of the League ... 'the Chairman might...in private conversation with Constituency chairmen...suggest a course of action'.¹¹⁵ The chairman declined to do so; a hand-written note recorded that the 'Chairman says No action...'.¹¹⁶

How was it that, although Conservative Central Office was opposed to dual membership and saw the League as pursuing policies distinct from its own, League members were active in Conservative party associations? It has been suggested that local party organisations in Britain, being composed of enthusiasts, 'are more tolerant of leaning to extremism than of deviation to the centre...'.¹¹⁷ The League's activities in the Bournemouth Conservative party are an example of this. In 1958, Major James Friend had been appointed as the prospective parliamentary candidate for Bournemouth to replace the sitting Tory MP, Nigel Nicolson. However, 'it having become no longer acceptable for a good Conservative to associate with Loyalists',¹¹⁸ Nicolson's supporters accused Friend of encouraging local members of the League, of helping them financially and infiltrating them into the local Association's committees. Friend's denial of this in a letter to *The Times* in December 1958 provoked Chesterton into publishing details of Friend's dealings with the League that showed the accusations to be true. Following intervention by Lord Hailsham, the Chairman of the Conservative party, who later described the League at the time as 'our sworn enemies',¹¹⁹ Friend resigned his candidature.

It is not exactly clear why there was such hostility in the Conservative party to the League. Hailsham's strong words may reflect the personal animosity between him and Chesterton. In an exchange of letters in *The Times*¹²⁰ he may have over-reacted in calling on the League's members not to attend private or public meetings of the party. *The Manchester Guardian* thought so, asking in an editorial: 'How can

¹¹⁵ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, C. O. O. to The Chairman, 5 July 1957.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Lawrence W. Martin, 'The Bournemouth Affair: Britain's First Primary Election', *Journal of Politics*, 22 (November 1960), 654-681 (p. 672).

¹¹⁸ Martin, 'The Bournemouth Affair', p. [x].

¹¹⁹ Quinton Hogg Hailsham of St. Marylebone, *A Sparrow's Flight: The Memoirs of Lord Hailsham of Marylebone* (London, 1990), p. 316.

¹²⁰ *The Times*, 17 and 18 October 1958.

any association undertake that its members will not attend public meetings?’¹²¹ The violence at the 1958 Tory conference may be a further cause of the hostility. It was seen as damaging to the party and arose from its determination to deal with the constant and irritatingly disruptive tactics of the League over a three year period. Violence and anti-Semitism had echoes of pre-war fascism and the overlapping membership, though small, may have caused the party to fear that it was in some way associated with extreme right-wing methods. As Lawrence has argued political violence can alienate supporters. In discussing the violence that occurred at a British Union of Fascists meeting at Olympia in 1934, he concludes that it had become unacceptable to maintain order at a public meeting by using violent stewarding and that the fascist leadership saw the events at Olympia as a ‘propaganda disaster of the first order’.¹²² It was the events at Olympia that illustrate Chesterton’s attitude to violence at public meetings. Doris Chesterton describes how he returned from the meeting angry at the violence of ‘two fascists holding down a communist while another kicked the prostrate figure’. Chesterton intervened to help the communist and told Doris later that evening that he would resign from the BUF, a decision that he rescinded the following day.¹²³ Nevertheless Chesterton was consistently opposed to the initiation of violence at meetings attended by League members.

The 1958 annual Conservative Party Conference in October had a litigious aftermath. It was a period during which the League simultaneously reached the apotheosis of its publicity seeking activities and the nadir of its relationship with the Conservative party and its members. According to Martin Walker the Conservative party was so concerned about the effective disruption of its conferences by League members that it ‘let it be known that [its] stewards would make a determined effort to control them’.¹²⁴ The ensuing violent methods used at Blackpool received extensive coverage in the national press. A Conservative party file on the incident contains fifty-one newspaper reports in the national press in the week following the incident, a significant volume when compared with the normal rate of coverage. In the words of six leading political journalists who had witnessed events, it was the

¹²¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 October 1958.

¹²² Jon Lawrence, ‘Fascist Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Inter-War Britain: the Olympia Debate Revisted’, *Historical Research*, 76 (May 2003), 238-267 (p. 266).

¹²³ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, interview with Doris Chesterton by D. L. Baker, 8 February 1980.

¹²⁴ Walker, *National Front*, p.30.

‘excessive violence amounting to brutality’¹²⁵ that had drawn the attention of the press. Ordinary party members were also critical of the violence; the Central Office file contains sixty-one letters to the prime minister or party chairman complaining of excessive violence that would damage the reputation of the party.¹²⁶ Hailsham sought an assurance from Chesterton that League members would no longer cause breaches of the peace at Conservative meetings but this was refused by Chesterton. The League, he asserted, would continue its policy of ‘Protest[ing] against Government policy which we believe...to be harmful to this country’s interests’.¹²⁷ This public argument in the columns of *The Times* and the events at Blackpool made it clear to Conservative members that they could no longer expect dual membership to be tolerated. Thayer has said that ‘[b]y the end of [1958], continued association with the Empire Loyalists meant political death for any Tory who still had political ambitions...Members began to fade as fast as they had joined’¹²⁸, a conclusion that accords with Chesterton’s own analysis, as we have seen.

This loss of largely Tory membership weakened the League’s ability to influence matters within the Conservative constituencies. Relations with Tory backbench MPs appear to have been no more effective. Looking back in 1972, Chesterton wrote: ‘In the middle ‘fifties...Henry Kerby, Conservative MP for Arundel...[told] ...me that he and very many of his colleagues greatly admired the work I was doing in defence of British interests at home and overseas. I [replied] that it would be even more encouraging were Members to defend these causes from the floor of the House.’¹²⁹ As time passed, Chesterton records, no such defence occurred and, seeking an explanation from Kerby, he concluded that backbenchers feared for their political futures if they spoke in Parliament in support of League policies.¹³⁰ The League was rarely mentioned in the House of Commons.¹³¹

In litigious matters the League was more effective. In April 1959 the League was ‘granted summonses for assault and battery against’ a commissionaire and a

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 29 October 1958.

¹²⁶ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/93.

¹²⁷ *The Times*, 28 October 1958.

¹²⁸ Thayer, *British Political Fringe*, p. 60.

¹²⁹ A. K. Chesterton, *Facing the Abyss* (Liss Forest, 1976), p. 16.

¹³⁰ Chesterton, *Facing the Abyss*, p. 18.

¹³¹ *The Parliamentary Archives Catalogue (Portcullis)* <www.portcullis.parliament.uk>.

Conservative party agent at the 1958 conference. At the subsequent hearing in June the defendants were acquitted; the court heard that ‘the League’s tactics were to create situations at meetings where the use of some force...will be inevitable’.¹³² This case is an example of the League’s propensity for litigation. Baker refers to Walker’s belief that Chesterton ‘fought fourteen successful libel actions against individuals and newspapers unwise enough to insinuate that he had ever been a traitor, or anti-British’¹³³ but states that he (Baker) could only find nine in the Chesterton Papers.¹³⁴ In an undated document prepared by Chesterton, probably in 1962, for his case against the Bank of Chile, reference is made to the League ‘having won twelve of the twelve actions for defamation which I have brought in various parts of the world’. There were at least two more court actions by the League after this date.

Some of these cases were reported in *The Times*: a sermon preached in St. Paul’s in which Canon Collins had claimed that the League had used ‘thugs to provoke [racial] violence’; an article in the *Glasgow Evening Times* saying that Chesterton was ‘disloyal to the Crown’; a report in the *Sheffield Star* suggesting the League had ‘incited racial violence’; a claim in Thayer’s book *The British Political Fringe* that the League had been involved in racial riots; and an attack on Chesterton’s patriotism in *The Hull Daily Mail*.¹³⁵ Through these successful actions Chesterton and the League demonstrated, at least in legal terms, that they were not racist, violent or unpatriotic but they also benefitted financially; Chesterton claimed in 1960 to have contributed £1200 to League funds from damages awarded to him¹³⁶ and in 1961 received £3000 for damages awarded against the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* which helped ‘to ‘give the movement a longer spell of life’.¹³⁷

Damages awarded to the League were a useful addition to its finances especially after the death of Jeffery in 1961 and the consequent loss of his donations. From time to time Chesterton appealed to the subscribers of *Candour* for donations but complained that only a small fraction of them responded and in 1964 he wrote

¹³² *The Times*, 2 June 1959.

¹³³ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 197.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 232.

¹³⁵ *The Times*, 17 April 1959; 4 June 1959; 22 June 1960; 1 November 1967; 15 December 1972.

¹³⁶ *Candour*, 3 June 1960.

¹³⁷ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E8.

that ‘I think we will continue to have a rough time financially’¹³⁸. Litigation as a source of funds could be risky. As late as 1967, the year in which the League merged with other organisations to form the National Front, Chesterton believed that if two ‘[legal] cases [against the *Bristol Evening Post* and the *Daily Mail*] went against us’ he would have to declare himself bankrupt ‘and certainly abandon any further financial responsibility for the movement’.¹³⁹ It is unclear to what extent the League relied, for its survival, on the damages won from libel cases but donations and perhaps legacies were an essential part of its finances. In 1966, Chesterton’s relative, Miss M.M. Chesterton, left him £7,148 a sum which he may well have made available to the League.

The League’s activities were intended to shape public opinion to which elected politicians were subject. But there is little evidence to that the League successfully influenced the opinions of MPs in the way that Chesterton had proposed in his *Candour* article in 1954 inaugurating the League. Why did the League’s imperial message have so little impact? This is a difficult question but within the context of the evidence of this chapter four reasons can be mooted. First, propaganda, however widely and stridently promulgated is not necessarily accepted by its audience. For example, shouting at a public meeting that the prime minister, Macmillan, was a traitor does not win the argument. Secondly, the League’s strategy was self-contradictory; it tried simultaneously to annoy and disrupt the Conservative Party whilst seeking the co-operation of its imperially-minded members in supporting its cause. When it became clear that these Conservatives had to choose between Conservatism and the League they overwhelmingly chose the former. In doing so they suggest a third issue: was there an imperial cause worth fighting for? In an analysis of key issues in candidates’ electoral addresses in the 1959 General Election the words ‘empire’ and ‘Commonwealth’ do not appear. The major issues then, and during the 1955 election, were the cost of living, social services and foreign policy. The Empire was not an issue: 47% of Conservative addresses failed to mention even a single Commonwealth country.¹⁴⁰ Fourthly, geo-political reasons may have rendered the League’s imperial mission unachievable however effective its

¹³⁸ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E9, Letter Chesterton to Mrs M. Ballaris, a donor, 11 May 1964.

¹³⁹ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, E15, Letter Chesterton to Austen Brooks 4 April 1967.

¹⁴⁰ D. E. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London, 1960), p. 132.

tactics might have been. Darwin has identified these as Britain's economic weakness; the widespread perception that it was a declining power in a world dominated by two super-powers; a belief that the empire was 'too burdensome...[and] no longer served a useful purpose'; a growing realisation of the importance of economic relations with Europe; and the increase in colonial nationalism.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

The League was created by Chesterton partly out of his own pressing need to provide himself with a living and partly out of his strong belief in the need to preserve the political cohesion of white British people throughout the world and thus British power and sovereignty. After the defeat of fascism and the realisation of its appalling persecution of the Jews, he saw clearly the need at least to appear to live down his past association with fascism. He recognised how difficult this would be. He was clear that the League must not be a political party; its strategy was to act as a pressure group that publicly attacked politicians, particularly those in the Conservative governing party, whom he accused of not supporting British imperial power and sovereignty.

The League was not successful in its endeavours to affect the process of decolonisation. First, the geo-political circumstances were such that forces causing decolonisation were irresistible. Secondly, the empire was not a major concern in British people's identity. There was a wide range of identities that people could adopt and even if they prioritised identity in terms of their Britishness, such Britishness could take many forms. Britishness generally was not founded on empire but on memories of Britain's successful role in the Second World War and on the unifying symbolism of the monarchy. Thus, thirdly, it would seem that only a very small section of society did give priority to imperial Britishness in choosing its identity. This social group was placed in the upper regions of society, privately educated and military. Many were members of the Conservative party. It was this social group that formed the backbone of the League and who were arguably those who were dedicated to imperial Britishness.

¹⁴¹ John Darwin, *The End of Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 5-7.

Within these strategic reasons for the League's failure to make an impact, the League's tactics can be seen to be flawed. They recognised that many of those who sympathised with their imperialism were within the Conservative party and so sought to infiltrate local associations and to woo the support of backbench MPs. But their publicity seeking tactics relied on disrupting political meetings and this alienated the Tory leadership to the extent that it was no longer tenable for Tories to belong to, or assist, the League. The consequent loss of membership to the League proved damaging.

There is no firm consensus among historians about the political nature of the League; some have seen it as fascist, others as the right-wing of the Tories. I shall argue in the next chapter that the League was not a fascist organisation. To categorise it as such obscures the opportunity to examine in detail its imperialist nature and the possible meaning, in British imperialism in post-war Britain, of the League's failure. In a period of overwhelming domination of the political scene by only two powerful political parties, it was perhaps inevitable that a small organisation like the League would have difficulty in promulgating its message. However, it was relatively successful within the context of minor political groups, existing for longer and gaining more publicity than almost any other. This suggests that there remained in post-war Britain a weak strain of imperial Britishness which the League was, to a degree, able to stimulate. More importantly the relative insignificance of the League suggests that the empire was largely irrelevant to all but a small minority of Britons in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter 6. The League of Empire Loyalists, imperialism, and right-wing extremism

In so far as it has been discussed at all, the League has typically been seen by historians as merely a right-wing, even fascist, group and this has tended to obscure its relevance to late expressions of imperialism in the twentieth century. This chapter will address this issue and argue that the League should also be recognised for its imperialism and its relationship to imperial ideas earlier in the century. If, as will be argued in the first part of this chapter, the League can be seen as an ultra-nationalist imperial activist group concerned about the loss of Britain's Empire, it is important to understand what the League was, the nature of its imperialism and its origins, matters which will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.

Largely because of Chesterton's pre-war fascist activities, the League of Empire Loyalists has been seen variously as fascist (by contemporary Conservative party officials), as post-fascist or neo-fascist by historians (such as David Baker, Michael Billig and Richard Thurlow, for example). Others such as D.S. Lewis and Martin Walker have argued that it was simply reactionary, or an expression of right-wing Conservatism. I shall argue that Chesterton's relatively short period of being directly involved in fascism between 1933 and 1938 was not, as David Baker has implied, the inevitable consequence of his upbringing and military experiences but an aberration. He seems almost literally to have wandered into the BUF but resigned from it in 1938 and later came to regret his association with fascism. His real concern in later life was with British power and sovereignty especially as manifested through the British Empire. He was not primarily a politician but a dedicated and prolific journalist. He combined these two driving forces in forming the League of Empire Loyalists. In addition he sought support from like-minded right-wing Conservative MPs who were concerned with the continuity of Britain's imperial power, some of whom were members of the Expanding Commonwealth Group and the 'Empire Stalwarts', groups discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

The League of Empire Loyalists has not been fully examined by historians but by doing so, we can see that to some extent it was mainly a publicity vehicle for Chesterton's nationalistic and imperial ideas and enabled him to make a living as a

journalist. Chesterton was sometimes an abrasive man whose principles often overrode practical considerations. Perhaps characteristically, he disagreed with the new owner of *Truth* about policy and left, in 1954, after eleven years as deputy editor, aware that his earlier fascist beliefs made his employment in journalism problematical. Chesterton's pre-war membership of Mosley's BUF had left him, in his own words, with 'guilt by association'.

In 1953, during a brief and typically fractious period of employment by Beaverbrook, he began to publish a weekly views-letter *Candour*. This drew the backing of a wealthy British expatriate businessman on whom Chesterton became financially dependent. Shortly afterwards in early 1954 he formed the League of Empire Loyalists which operated largely as a propaganda and publicity seeking group and which seemed more in keeping with his long-established patriotic imperial beliefs than his relatively brief association with the BUF. He tried to give it an air of respectability by appointing 'names' to its Council and Executive Committee and also organised a 'commando' of activists skilled in disrupting public meetings especially those of the Conservative Party. Recourse to litigation was an eagerly exploited opportunity to bring the League publicity.

The League was a political group that never wholeheartedly sought representation in local or Westminster government. Chesterton strove to preserve its exclusive, middle class image rather than gain political power. His main political arena was the Conservative Party which he sought to disrupt whilst at the same time seeking support from its right-wing members, including backbench MPs. Thus the League never achieved mass membership or representative power; it rarely promulgated positive policies for the retention of Empire and Commonwealth but it served as a right-wing publicity machine providing a self-employed role for Chesterton.

The League pursued imperialist arguments and can be placed in a wider context from which tentative conclusions about Britishness and Empire in the 1950s can be drawn that help to understand how Britishness was changing. Britishness is, to use Anderson's terminology, an 'imagined community' and is therefore subjective and perceived in different ways by different groups. Furthermore, because the British

Empire was not a homogeneous group of polities, we can look at it simultaneously in the racist terms of Stuart Ward's 'sameness' of the white settler ('kith and kin') communities and Colley's 'other' of the non-white colonies.¹ At the same time different groups expressing an interest in Empire can emphasise either its political, economic or cultural features. The social make-up of the League (white, middle and upper-class, military) meant that Chesterton and the League emphasised a racist, cultural, 'kith and kin' approach to their imperial Britishness. Their ambiguous impact on the Conservative Party is exemplified by their disruptive tactics and by their amicable relationships with some Tory backbenchers who, similarly, were white, middle class military men with an anglo-centric economic and political view of imperial Britishness.

The League failed to influence the direction in which Britain's role developed in the 1950s because it was narrowly focused on an outdated view of imperial Britishness that could not counter Britain's declining economic and political power, and a modern form of patriotism based more on memories of war and monarchy than on empire. For example, Chesterton's patriotism was a mid-twentieth century expression of a white Greater Britain, a concept that had been pursued unsuccessfully by the Imperial Federation League in the 1880s and 1890s. The League, it will be argued, was a last expression of imperial Britishness that had connections with imperial ideas from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Of all the parameters that might describe 'Britishness', Empire was perhaps of most rapidly declining relevance. The ideology and beliefs of the League in the 1950s help to explain Britain's anachronistic residual imperial Britishness. Historians' preoccupation with its fascist associations has caused this opportunity to be largely overlooked.

The right-wing nature of the League

Even though Chesterton denied that the League was fascist,² historians and contemporaries have generally contested this for various reasons. As we have seen, the League provided a training ground for a new generation of fascists and it also

¹ Stuart Ward, 'The end of empire and the fate of Britishness', *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (eds.) (Basingstoke, 2004) p.245.

² Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 237.

attracted a small number of pre-war fascists such as Chambers-Hunter, a former BUF activist in Aberdeen.³ A contemporary commentator wrote that there was ‘a distinct odour of [Defence Regulation] 18B about the organisation’⁴, a reference to the detention of right-wing extremists during the war. Certainly Frank Clifford, a member of the League’s National Council, and Ben Greene, father of M.C. Greene, the League’s organising secretary, were so detained. Perceptions of racism and anti-Semitism, although denied by Chesterton, also contributed to the League being seen as fascist and, after the Second World War, ‘the extreme right [was] widely portrayed as...fascist’⁵ particularly because of the political re-emergence of Oswald Mosley and his supporters in 1948.

Roger Eatwell has referred to a ‘strand of British fascism...during the 1940s and early 1950s...nurtured by A.K. Chesterton’⁶ Richard Thurlow has described Chesterton as ‘the key instigator of...the main surface tradition in post-1945 British fascism...as expanded in the programme of the [League]’.⁷ Grant Kamanju unequivocally described the League as ‘out and out fascist’.⁸ Contemporaries, in the Conservative Party, also saw the League as fascist. Thus Herbert Lee, the Chief Conservative agent in Bradford, in a speech in January 1956 said: ‘This organisation appears to be of a similar character to that of the pre-war British Fascist Movement’, to which the League responded by threatening legal action.⁹ Barbara Brooks, an official at the Conservative Party’s Central Office, wrote to MPs and party candidates in 1956: ‘[The League’s] outlook is fascist’; and D. Kaberry, a Conservative MP, held the view that there was ‘no reason to believe that...contributions to [*Candour*] are...not fascist minded’.¹⁰ Perceptions of the League’s fascism were not unanimous, however. In his analysis of the nature of the League, Neill Nugent concludes that despite it being ‘widely portrayed ...as

³ C. Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London, 1961), p. 20.

⁴ Andrew Roth, ‘Loyalists in League’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 52 (1956), 9-10.

⁵ Nugent, ‘Post-war Fascism’, p. 205.

⁶ Eatwell, *Fascism*, p. 264.

⁷ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 257.

⁸ Grant Kamanju, Review of *Disappointed Guests*, ed by Henry Tajfel and John Dawson (London, 1965), *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 4 (1966), 131-132 (p. 131).

⁹ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Report of speech by Herbert Lee, January 1956.

¹⁰ Bodn. CPA CCO3/5/88, Barbara Brooke 1 February 1956.

following the classic fascist tradition', and 'displaying fascist characteristics...it is hardly legitimate to view them as pure fascists'.¹¹

If then, historians and contemporary commentators of the League have stated that it was fascist, it is important to be precise and rigorous in examining this belief. Any valid examination therefore requires a definition of fascism. Defining fascism, however, is problematical but, using scholars of fascism and looking closely at the ideology of the League, I shall argue that the League was not truly fascist. In doing so, however, it is important to recognise that Chesterton's denial of fascism was pragmatic; he needed to secure a living that depended on the continued viability of the League and *Candour*. His post-war actions and journalism may well have been tempered by his need to hide his true beliefs and thus his rejection of fascism can be seen as ambiguous.

Paxton refers to the difficulty of finding 'the famous "fascist minimum" which is supposed to allow us to formulate a neat general definition of fascism',¹² and yet if a group of people is referred to as fascist some working definition is necessary if the validity of the description is to be tested. By examining the definitions suggested by scholars of fascism it is possible to identify common ground and thus suggest such a working definition. Neill Nugent has suggested that fascism includes: rejection of liberal democracy and parliamentary government and their replacement by authoritarian rule by an elite; the centrality of racially pure ultra-nationalism that looks back to a 'golden age'; aggressively expansionist and imperialist policies; economic activity controlled by a corporate state at the heart of a supportive Empire; and mystical appeals to the masses that direct them to seek a new beginning.¹³ Roger Griffin agrees with this analysis: '[f]ascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythical core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'.¹⁴ The desire for this 're-birth' is created in the minds of the people 'after a period of crisis or decline'¹⁵ and its effectiveness depends on what Benedict Anderson has called an 'imagined community'. Robert Paxton has

¹¹ Nugent, 'Post-war Fascism', p. 205, p. 222.

¹² Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London, 2004), p. 14.

¹³ Nugent, 'Post-war Fascism', pp. 205-210.

¹⁴ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), p. 26.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 32.

examined what he calls the ‘mobilising passions’ of fascism. These include feelings of decline, overwhelming crisis and victimhood in a group which has supremacy over the individuals who comprise it; a requirement that the group be made more homogeneous and closely integrated and led by a ‘national chieftain’ whose leadership is intuitive and superior to ‘abstract and universal reason’. The group believes in the ‘beauty of violence’ and its right to ‘dominate others without restraint’ in a Darwinian world.¹⁶ Finally, Michael Mann defines fascism as ‘the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism’ through paramilitarism. He sees the fascists’ idea of nation as one to which they are deeply committed and containing ‘an unusually strong sense of its enemies’. The totalitarian, corporate state is the key actor in dealing with crises in which social unrest is suppressed and the nation purified of its enemies using the fascist party’s own paramilitary forces.¹⁷

From this brief and selective analysis the following suggested definition provides a framework for the discussion of the fascist content of the beliefs and values of Chesterton and thus the League: fascism seeks to create a corporate state led by an authoritarian elite that, following a period of decline or crisis, desires a re-birth or new beginning of the nation that draws on a belief in a ‘golden age’ or mystical past; and by appealing to the masses the ruling elite seeks to inculcate racially pure ultra-nationalism and uses violent paramilitary means to deal with its enemies. To what extent did the League contain these elements of fascism?

In any attempt to assess the League’s belief and values, it would be wrong to under-estimate the perceptions of fascism that surrounded the League. Chesterton had most certainly been a fascist in the 1930s and this and his continuing anti-Semitism suggest that it was likely that the League would be, to a degree, seen as fascist. Even though in 1938 in a pamphlet *Why I Left Mosley* he had denounced Mosley, Chesterton, in 1953, still regarded his association with him as an ‘accursed spectre’.¹⁸ Nevertheless the League’s objects emphasise Britishness, sovereignty and imperial power, not fascism. Did the League, then, stand for what its aims and title suggest, that is, simply a group of patriotic imperialists; or was it fascist? In

¹⁶ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, pp. 218-220.

¹⁷ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 13-16.

¹⁸ HLRO, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462, A. K. Chesterton to Lord Beaverbrook, 31 January 1953.

attempting to answer this question, it is reasonable to focus on Chesterton himself. He rejected the idea that the League was ‘Chesterton’s movement’¹⁹ but he was such a central figure to *Candour* and the League, editing the former, head of policy of the latter and controlling the finances of both through his personal connection with Jeffery, that we may assume that he accurately represented the League’s ideology. What was Chesterton’s personal response to post-war accusations that he and the League were fascist?

In a letter written to Beaverbrook in 1953, Chesterton refers to the rejection of Mosley rather than an ideology: ‘When I found I was having too much of Mosley, I gave up the habit’.²⁰ It would appear, therefore, that it was Mosley rather than fascism that was Chesterton’s ‘accursed spectre’. This is consistent with Chesterton’s explanation in 1938 of his reasons for his resignation in *Why I Left Mosley*: ‘I left because I became convinced that the BUF was playing about with a great idea and producing...a parody on National-Socialism thought and principle’.²¹ Nowhere in the four-page pamphlet does he renounce National-Socialism; his disillusionment is with Mosley’s ineffective leadership in serving ‘a new and vital creed’, suggesting that Chesterton saw the BUF as insufficiently fascist. However, David Baker argues that ‘Chesterton’s loss of faith in fascism...[was caused by]...the failure of the Mosley movement *and the annexation, war and genocide perpetrated by the Nazis*’ (emphasis added).²² That these events came after Chesterton’s resignation from the BUF suggests that Chesterton’s retreat from fascism evolved over a period of months, even years. In his post-war denial of fascism, *Laying the Fascist Ghost*, he refers to his belief in the nineteen-thirties that ‘the Fascist Corporate State [was] a possible means of harmonising sectional differences, of securing industrial peace...and of introducing a more realistic method of popular representation through the occupational franchise. Whether or not these were good ideas it would now be profitless to argue’ but the ‘regimes which espoused them, turning criminally insane...left as their memorials the foulness of Ravensbruck...’²³. Chesterton argues that he ‘recoiled with horror from such

¹⁹ *Candour*, 3 June 1960.

²⁰ HLRO, Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/462.

²¹ A. K. Chesterton, *Why I left Mosley*, (London, undated)

²² Baker, *The Ideology of Obsession*, p. 187.

²³ *Candour*, 16 November 1954.

outrages', had fought for his country in the war and yet was (falsely) accused of being fascist. Both here and in his letter to Beaverbrook, Chesterton seems to be adopting the position that it is not fascism *per se* that must be rejected but its leadership and implementation. Even if his denial of fascism was ambiguous or insincere, it was pragmatic because he saw that accusations of fascism were harmful to the League and its members: 'great damage [could be done] to what I believe is the most promising movement to arise in post-war Britain'.²⁴ If we accept Chesterton's personal declaration of his rejection of fascism, how was it possible for him to espouse with similar fervour the cause of British sovereignty and Empire? The development of Chesterton's sociological profile suggests that he was readily able to take up first, fascism, and subsequently, imperialism as his creed.

Terms such as fascism, nationalism, patriotism and imperialism have no universally agreed definitions and thus remain matters of subjective perception and carry with them the possibility that their meanings can be partly conflated. Chesterton's fascist past and his later British imperial patriotism arguably illustrate such perceived blending. For example, in November 1954, a member of the League Executive Committee resigned accusing Chesterton of using *Candour* to argue a neo-fascist line. His colleague's claim arose from Chesterton's approval of what he termed Hitler's 'revolt in the thirties against the tyranny of the Money Power'. Chesterton had used this as an argument to support his case for 'a strong system of Imperial Preference which would enable the British nations within an integrated Empire system to insulate themselves against the wiles...of international finance'.²⁵ What Chesterton saw as British imperialism, it seems, others might see as fascism but he vigorously denied the charge of fascism: 'I give...my solemn word of honour that neither through *Candour* nor the League, have I, or will I at any future time espouse...any Fascist doctrine'.²⁶

A further explanation for Chesterton's transition from fascism to imperialism may lie in part in David Baker's analysis of the causes of Chesterton's fascism

²⁴ *Candour*, 16 November 1954.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

‘through studying [his] development from childhood sentiment to full Fascist consciousness’.²⁷

[The] ‘ideas and events crucial to his ideological evolution’ [include] his childhood spent amongst jingoistic patriotism...of fin de siècle British South Africa; his cloistered private education in England; his dreadful and yet uplifting experience of war while still intellectually and emotionally immature, and the bleak disillusionment of peace...[his opposition to] Afrikaner nationalism...aimed at removing [South Africa] from his beloved British Empire...his immersion in the small-minded world of the British cultural elite of the 1920s and early thirties; and finally the impact of Fascism itself...Together, in the wake of his collapse of faith in Fascism, these experiences produced a man in whom the ‘needle stuck’ on [an]...ideology which mixed conspiratorial anti-Semitism and racist Empire Loyalism...²⁸

Chesterton’s fascism and British empire loyalism thus had common roots but he was a *British* fascist and his patriotism was stronger than his fascism. As Skidelsky has observed Chesterton was, unlike his BUF colleagues, critical of Germany and this difference was ‘one of the issues that led to the break with Mosley’.²⁹ Evidence of the strength of his British patriotism is also apparent from his military career; he fought for his country in two world wars, volunteering on both occasions, the first at the age of sixteen, and had won the Military Cross in 1918.³⁰

The idea of common roots to Chesterton’s fascism and British imperial patriotism is echoed in his social similarity to those on the right-wing of the Conservative Party. Baker refers to W.F. Mandle’s analysis of the characteristics of leading British fascists in the nineteen thirties which fits Chesterton (middle-class, public school, ex-officer in the First World War and widely travelled) and argues that these sociological features could have brought Chesterton into the Conservative party instead of the BUF were it not for his belief in fascist ideas. But as we have seen, these ideas were soured for Chesterton initially because of his frustration with Mosley and then by his abhorrence of Nazism, leaving Chesterton to take a less extreme right-wing position and to resemble a right-wing Conservative *manqué*.

²⁷ David Baker, ‘A. K. Chesterton: The Making of a British Fascist’ (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1982), pp. xxiv-xxv.

²⁸ Baker, ‘A. K. Chesterton’, pp. xxiv-xxv.

²⁹ Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, p. 344.

³⁰ Mackey, *A. K. Chesterton, M.C.*

Through his control of League committees, policy, finance and the content of *Candour*, Chesterton was a powerful force in the League. The ethos of the League rested largely in his hands. We cannot know his innermost beliefs about fascism after the end of the Second World War but if we accept his stated abhorrence of Nazism and his patriotic willingness to criticise Hitler's Germany as genuine then we must at least have serious doubts that he wished to lead the League in a fascist direction. Chesterton's roots allowed him to be either fascist or imperialist and to move from the former to the full expression of the latter. The people in the League National Council and Executive Committee were those with whom he wished to be associated and, as I have argued, they bore close sociological similarities to right-wing Conservative imperialist parliamentarians. Right-wing conservatism and fascism are not necessarily bedfellows. Robert Paxton has noted that, 'one cannot consider fascism simply as a more muscular form of conservatism'.³¹ Thus if, because of their party membership and military experiences of fighting fascism, these Conservative right-wing MPs were not fascist, then members of the League of such similar sociological roots and experiences may also not have been fascist but simply the imperialists they claimed to be.

This discussion of the values of the League so far has rested on subjective and circumstantial bases. Another source from which to assess the ideology of the League, in the context of the suggested definition of fascism, is Chesterton's series of articles in *Candour*, whose aim was 'to serve as a link between Britons all over the world in protest against the surrender of their world heritage'.³² Chesterton was a prolific journalist and one can only, here, consider a fraction of his writings in *Candour*, the more significant of which occasionally appeared as reprinted pamphlets such as *Sound the Alarm; A Warning to the British Nations* (1954); *Britain Faces the Abyss* (1955); and *Tomorrow; A Plan for the British Future* (1961). Chesterton's most lasting publication, *The New Unhappy Lords* (first published in 1965), is also relevant to analysing his beliefs.

³¹ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 11.

³² *Candour*, 29 January 1954.

There is considerable evidence of a racially pure nationalism in the League's ideology that differed from that of other imperial activist groups. In the latter part of the nineteenth century a racist view of Empire was held by some imperial thinkers but it was unlike that of Chesterton and the LEL. Almost all other imperial activist groups did not take such an aggressively racist view as the LEL, who believed that race was of key importance to their policies. Generally, other groups concentrated on trade, defence or education, albeit often solely with the white Dominions, without articulating a very pronounced racist ideology. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the white Dominions, and belief in the superiority of Great Britain did create a form of racism. Exceptionally, the hatred of the British Empire Union for Germans came closest to the LEL's racism in its extremism but it was aimed at white Europeans, not black Africans; and the Victoria League discouraged relations between its female members and visiting Indian men. The nation that Chesterton imagined was the 'British peoples throughout the world'. He distinguished between the white Dominions and white settlers on the one hand, and indigenous people on the other, in strongly racial terms. Thus, for example, in discussing the Conservative government's constitutional proposals for Kenya in 1954, he complained that they:

[allow] Africans and Asians to occupy positions that would bring European affairs to some extent within their purview and place European officials in a position of subordination to them...it may very well mean an end of Britain in Africa...sooner or later the settlers must boil over at the absurdity of pretending that near-savages can participate as equals in the complexities of modern government.³³

In a speech at the League's annual general meeting in 1960 he consistently pursued his racist point, explaining to members that the League would never 'accept the obscene humbug that the Black man has the brains, the know-how, the self-control to warrant his being given power over helpless White minorities anywhere on earth'.³⁴ This was greeted with loud applause.

His racism was not confined to Africa. It was expressed when black immigrants to Britain arrived during the nineteen-fifties and called for racial purity in Britain: the Conservative Party had failed to 'stop successive waves of coloured

³³ *Candour*, 19 March 1954.

³⁴ *Candour*, 28 October 1960.

immigration...an invasion which, unless checked, will one day obliterate every characteristic feature which has brought renown to the British people'.³⁵ And it was not simply the colour of a man's skin that provoked Chesterton's racism. He had been strongly anti-Semitic during his days with the BUF and although he denied that he and the League were anti-Semitic, his conspiratorial theory of the Jewish Money Power that sought to destroy the British world and to attain world government formed the continuous core of his philosophy. His attacks on Jews were concentrated on their dominating influence of world institutions such as the World Bank and his post-war anti-Semitism was specifically against Jewish financiers rather than Jews in their entirety. Certainly David Baker concludes that Chesterton's anti-Semitism was cultural rather than biological.³⁶ Nevertheless any attack on Jews in post-war Britain could expect to be seen in the context of the Nazi extermination of Jews and thus associate the League with anti-Semitism and fascism.

The League's perception of its 'nation' drew on its white, racist view of the Commonwealth. The white Dominions and the African white settler colonies were its 'imagined community' and these were the countries in which the League had its branches. The 'nation' was thus white British people in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Kenya and the Rhodesias as well as those in Britain itself. These were the people to which Chesterton repeatedly referred to as kith and kin. The cornerstone of the League's nationalism was the preservation of British sovereignty which, it argued, was threatened by international institutions and its campaign was 'on the sole issue of national and imperial survival'.³⁷ Chesterton's belief that nations had existed since antiquity and depended on 'centuries of common effort, of living together, striving together, being bound together in times of hardship and adversity'³⁸ is profoundly exclusive and resonates with Ernest Renan's idea that: '[t]o have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together; to wish to do so again, that is the essential

³⁵ *Candour*, 28 October 1960.

³⁶ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 90.

³⁷ *Candour*, 26 March 1954.

³⁸ A. K. Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords*, 3rd American edn. (Oregon, 1970), p. 12.

condition of being a nation'.³⁹ For Chesterton, only those who had shared the nation's long imperial history could belong to it.

Renan's statement is one of many attempts to define the nation but another, Hobsbawm's basic idea that it is 'a body of people whose members regard themselves as...a "nation"',⁴⁰ helps to explain how a self-selecting group such as the League, with their common culture and white imperial heritage could seek to cohere worldwide. Chesterton's declaration that the League should fight for national and imperial survival and his belief that '[m]ost of the people who feel passionately about the betrayal of Britain are Britons who were born abroad or who have lived abroad'⁴¹ is evidence of this and that a sense of imperial kinship defined those who belonged to the same 'nation'. To understand fully the League's nationalism requires acceptance of nationalism as 'loyalty to the nation'⁴² rather than as meaning seeking the congruence of the nation and the state. The League's persistent and extreme insistence on this loyalty, its sentiments of racial kinship and its extreme view of what Britain's sovereignty should be, meant that it was ultra-nationalist.

Chesterton's writings contain repetitive references that resonate with other parameters of fascism: a golden age, decline and crisis, and re-birth. For example, the titles of his pamphlets published by the League contain words such as 'abyss', 'betrayal', 'suicide', 'graveyard' and 'alarm'. A three-page pamphlet, *Britain Faces the Abyss*⁴³ typifies these aspects of fascism. Chesterton begins by saying that a man 'who has no romantic vision of his country's past' is either a prig or a 'materialist clod'. To prove that this is so it is necessary only to 'recall the spirit of times past...and the emotional climate of one's youth'. He saw that the changes since the beginning of the century were amazing and perplexing. Once we were proud of 'what our kinsmen were and what they achieved' and our 'Imperial destiny' was an 'intensification of this feeling of kinship'. But 'today the vision has faded' and the 'ecstasy [of the beginning of the twentieth century] is dead and we shall never know

³⁹ Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?', in *Nationalism*, ed. by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford, 1994), pp. 17-18.

⁴⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1992), p. 8.

⁴¹ *Candour*, 26 February 1954.

⁴² Walker Connor, 'A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a...' [sic], in *Nationalism*, ed. by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford, 1994), pp. 36-46 (p. 40).

⁴³ A. K. Chesterton, *Britain Faces the Abyss* (Thornton Heath, undated).

its like again'. Chesterton lyrically personalises this belief in a golden age before the First World War: '...all too brief were my brisk winter evenings on the Rugby field, my tranquil summer evenings at the wicket'. His childhood, he explains, had been cut short when, in 1915, at the age of sixteen, he had volunteered for the army.⁴⁴

According to Chesterton, after this golden age came decline and crisis. The aftermath of the war, he believed, had seen the first serious questioning of belief in patriotism. The reasons for this may lie in the enormous loss of life and the Russian Revolution and its global message to workers to unite but 'much more importantly [in] the shift of financial power from London to New York'.⁴⁵ There Jewish money power had set about undermining British sovereignty. The decline continued after the Second World War when British sovereignty had been undermined by 'international agencies brought into being by Wall St. to secure...domination of the world' and 'choke to death [Britain's] distinctive nationhood'.⁴⁶

Drawing on this backward-looking analysis of a lost 'golden age' and deeply felt sense of British decline and crisis, Chesterton saw the necessity of national resurgence. In March 1954, when he called for the setting up of the League, he argued that international forces sought to destroy the British Empire and nations and that they must be opposed by '[awakening] the national spirit. The League should not adopt any particular social or economic reforms because' British resurgence was the essential first condition' of better economic and social conditions.⁴⁷ The emphasis here is on strengthening nationalist feelings rather than the palingenetic ultra-nationalism that Roger Griffin argues is the essence of fascism.⁴⁸ There was no sense of 'structural dysfunction, socio-political and economic collapse in Britain' ⁴⁹ at that time. Indeed Chesterton himself saw this, complaining that the British people had been seduced by the Macmillan government's facilitation of the availability of consumer goods and thus too content to be concerned with any threat to British sovereignty.

⁴⁴ Chesterton, *Britain Faces the Abyss*.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Candour*, 26 March 1954.

⁴⁸ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 202.

Chesterton and the League saw the importance of appealing to the masses and thus gaining publicity for their ideas. They did not organise rallies, marches or demonstrations⁵⁰ but concentrated on disrupting meetings and events, such as Conservative party conferences and visits by foreign politicians such as Archbishop Makarios, at which the press and television cameras would in any case be present. Such activities brought them publicity and helped to increase membership to its peak of 3000 but this does not compare well with the mass support gained by, for example, Mosley's pre-war BUF whose membership reached an estimated 40,000 in 1939.⁵¹ Although Chesterton wished to retain an elite membership, nevertheless its search for mass appeal is characteristic of fascist movements even if it did not succeed. Although the League may have failed in this respect it saw it as an important part of its strategy; Chesterton sought to generate 'nation-wide protest [to] compel politicians...to face the realities of an awakened national spirit'.⁵² It did not, however, seek violent or terrorist means in attempting to become a significant political pressure group.⁵³

What conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of the ideology of the League against the suggested framework of fascist characteristics? The League expressed its imperial and domestic policies in racist terms; it was ultra-nationalist; and it looked back to a golden age. These were its fascist components. It tried to generate a sense of crisis and of degeneration and called for a resurgence of the national spirit. It did not employ political violence and although aware of the central importance of mass support, did not achieve it. These are the parts of fascism at which it failed or which it eschewed. The League did not wish to be a political party seeking executive power but was an ultra-nationalist imperial pressure group determined to alert British people to the potential loss of sovereignty and empire. It had some fascist elements in its ideology and Chesterton's ambiguous denials of his personal belief in fascism assist this conclusion, but it was far from being fully and virulently fascist.

⁵⁰ Thurlow, *Fascism in Modern Britain*, p. 137.

⁵¹ Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, p. 332.

⁵² *Candour*, 26 March 1954.

⁵³ Thurlow, *Fascism in Modern Britain*, p. 137.

If the League was not fascist, what were its predominant values and beliefs? What form did its version of British imperialism take? And what were its roots?

The nature and roots of the League's imperialism

Because A.K. Chesterton was such a dominant force within the League, it is reasonable to look for the origins and development of the League's ideology in Chesterton's own imperial background and beliefs and in the light of the imperial thinking of other groups such as the IFL who, like Chesterton, believed in the necessity of the global dominance of Britain and the Dominions. Although David Baker, in *Ideology of Obsession*, has closely examined the nature of Chesterton's fascism and how it arose from his early years, he has not considered how these same years could have created his love for the British Empire. He observes that the 'general over-concentration [by historians such as W.F. Mandle and Colin Holmes] on the anti-Semitic aspects of [Chesterton's] fascist ideology has tended to draw scholars away from wider understanding of his fascism...'⁵⁴ In a similar vein it could be argued that 'over-concentration' on Chesterton's fascism has caused his imperialism to be neglected. This is especially the case when one considers that he spent only five years, from 1933, as a fascist activist and propagandist compared with almost thirty years, from 1944, writing and campaigning for the British Empire and the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. From the beginning of his association with the BUF until his death, Chesterton stuck steadfastly to his racist, anti-Semitic and conspiracy theory beliefs. Arguably, however, he replaced fascism, his principal ideology in the 1930s, with a passionate and active belief in Britain and its Empire. Indeed in tracing the causes of Chesterton's fascism, David Baker indicates this outcome.⁵⁵ As we saw earlier in the chapter he identifies important events in Chesterton's early years that caused his fascism and it is notable how some of these same events contain the seeds of an imperialist attitude.

Furthermore, during his time with Oswald Mosley, Chesterton did not allow fascism to monopolise his journalism. He wrote articles on imperialism for *Blackshirt*, such as *Empire Trade Before Foreign Trade*, *Rudyard Kipling: Poet and*

⁵⁴ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Baker, 'A. K. Chesterton', pp. xxiv-xxv.

Prophet of Empire and *Should the British Empire be Disestablished?* This is evidence that Chesterton maintained a much more tenacious belief in the British Empire throughout his life than he did on fascism and to neglect this is to arrive at an incomplete understanding of Chesterton's beliefs and the policies he established in the League of Empire Loyalists. From 1944 until 1954, when he wrote for *Truth*, and from the latter year until his death in 1973, Chesterton wrote almost weekly about politics in Britain and in its Empire. This journalism, which has been neglected by historians, provides a valuable source from which to describe and analyse Chesterton's, and thus the League's, imperialism. (Although Chesterton also wrote regularly during this period about conspiracy theories of domination by Jewish financiers of international governance, it is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss these issues in detail, except in so far as they relate directly, in Chesterton's view, to the British Empire.)

There are a number of dominant themes to the imperialism of Chesterton and the League, some of which, as will be discussed later, can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. This atavistic imperialism of Chesterton after the Second World War is clearly illustrated by his wife's comment, in 1978:

He was one of those who really believed in the [First World] war and the principle for which it was fought: the preservation of the British Empire...Kenneth considered the British Empire to have been the highest flowering of civilisation.⁵⁶

She believed his attitude was similar to Kipling's and that it was 'frozen in the period 1914-18'. Collin Brooks, however, saw Chesterton as influenced by an even earlier period in British history, opining that Chesterton was stuck, not in 1915, but in 1815. Similarly, his enduring and repetitive discussion of conspiracy theory also looked back to former times; it was derived from his second cousin, Cecil Chesterton, brother of G.K. Chesterton. A.K. Chesterton wrote in his unpublished autobiography, *Blame Not My Lute*, written between 1966 and 1973,⁵⁷: 'It was inevitable...that I should feel impelled to carry on Cecil's crusade from the point

⁵⁶ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, A12.

⁵⁷ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, p. 234.

where death [in 1918] had forced him to abandon it'.⁵⁸ Thus one of the keys to understanding Chesterton's beliefs, certainly his conspiracy theory and imperialism, is that he formed them early in his life and stuck unwaveringly to them. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will describe Chesterton's dominant imperial themes and attempt to show ways in which they can be related to the ideas of Hobson and imperialists such as Seeley, Dilke, Froude, Milner and Joseph Chamberlain. It is thus necessary, first of all, to establish the nature of the imperialism in which Chesterton believed.

In June 1954, 'sponsors and subscribers of *Candour* and their friends'⁵⁹ met at Caxton Hall to elect a Council to draw up a constitution for the League. The basic constitutional objects of the League were explicitly and briefly stated in various of its pamphlets. Some of them resonate with the purposes of earlier imperial activist groups such as the Overseas Club which had sought to draw British people together throughout the world in comradeship; and the Imperial Federation League and Round Table who believed in the integration of Great Britain and the Dominions. The LEL's aims were: '1. [t]he maintenance and, where necessary, the recovery of the sovereign independence of the British Peoples throughout the world; 2. [t]he strengthening of the spiritual and material bonds between the British Peoples throughout the world; 3. [t]he conscientious development of the British Colonial Empire under British direction and local British leadership; 4. [t]he resurgence at home and abroad of the British spirit.'⁶⁰ What the League sought was a 'world system based on the former White Dominions' and rejection of all international institutions that limited British sovereignty. Without providing specific evidence, Chesterton argued that there was a conspiracy of the 'Money Power' of bankers operating in New York and working closely with Moscow, whose purpose was to destroy the overseas empires of European nations and to replace them with a Jewish led world government. From a British viewpoint, the white Dominions, with their shared British heritage, were capable of breaking up this conspiracy and thus becoming the dominant force in the world. This was the only lasting way in which worldwide British sovereignty could be recovered. Chesterton was fully aware that

⁵⁸ Bath Univ. Chesterton Archive, B5, *Blame Not My Lute*, Chapter 9.

⁵⁹ *Candour*, 28 May 1954.

⁶⁰ A. K. Chesterton, *Tomorrow: A Plan for the British Future* (Croydon, undated but c.1961), p. 25.

the direction in which Britain's foreign policy was developing was directly counter to the League's objectives but, writing in 1961, seven years after founding the League (a period during which Britain had granted independence to Ghana, Malaya, Cyprus, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanganyika, and was actively considering an application to join the European Economic Community), he saw no need to change the League's principles. The case for 'the survival of the British world' needed simply to be restated.⁶¹ This is further evidence of Chesterton's adamant conservatism and failure to modify beliefs formed in his early life.

To achieve the dominance of the white Dominions, Chesterton argued, all international agencies that impaired British sovereignty, such as the United Nations, the IMF and World Bank should be rejected. Britain should also leave the Commonwealth because it was no longer *British*; its Afro-Asian members were acting to undermine British power. In place of the Commonwealth there would arise the white Dominions acting together in order to protect their national sovereignty. If Afro-Asian countries wished to associate with the Dominions they would have to do so on terms laid down by the 'White nations of the British world', whose 'supreme unifying factor...should be the British Crown'.⁶² To bring about this new world system, Chesterton argued, required that the British people, especially those in Britain itself, be alerted and the issues clarified in their minds.

From this broad summary, one can divide the League's imperialism into four basic pillars that supported the League's over-arching view of what British imperialism should be, that is, a white, worldwide British kith and kin led by the Motherland towards greater cohesion and headed by the monarchy. The first of these themes was a catalyst: a sense of foreboding about international rivalries and the relative decline of Britain and her empire. There was an urgent need to address the issue. Secondly, there was a racist belief in the innate superiority of Britain and the Dominions both relative to other, developed, nations and also to the dependent colonies of the British Empire. The latter were seen as barbaric and incapable of effective self-government and independence. Thirdly, the League was nationalistic and fiercely opposed to any loss of British sovereignty through membership of

⁶¹ Chesterton, *Tomorrow*, p. 14.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 23.

supra-national bodies such as the United Nations, NATO and GATT. Finally, Britain's relative decline and the threat of the loss of Empire could be overcome through greater cooperation in imperial trade and by the strengthening of imperial defence. The ideas and beliefs underlying these pillars of the League's ideology were not new. As Robert Pearce has observed: '[r]ight-wing organisations such as the League of Empire Loyalists...which can be so difficult...to understand, will be readily understood by historians familiar with the climate of imperial thinking in Britain at the start of the twentieth century'.⁶³ Pearce's statement supports the view that the League should be seen as an *imperial* organisation but he makes no detailed analysis to support this even though there is a substantial body of writing and speeches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Seeley, Dilke, Froude, Milner, Joseph Chamberlain and others to which the ideas of the League can be related. The League was not alone in this: for example, Milner and Chamberlain, as we have seen, were influential in groups such as the ISAA, the Victoria League, the Tariff Reform League and the Junior Imperial League.

Thus, for example, the threat of imperial disintegration and public apathy were long-standing concerns of imperialist activists. When Chesterton wrote in 1954 '[t]he British Empire is disintegrating',⁶⁴ he was directly echoing the words of John Edward Jenkins, an Australian barrister, writer and Liberal MP at Westminster, who wrote in 1871 'we are drifting to the disintegration of our Empire'.⁶⁵ Jenkins' use of the word 'drifting' suggests a belief that many British people were indifferent to, or unaware of, the threats to British global power and this too is echoed by Chesterton: the purpose of *Candour*, he repeatedly stated, was to alert the British people to threats to British power and imperialism. For Jenkins, Chesterton, and other imperialists, the existence of a strong, integrated Empire mattered because it was essential to the relative politico-economic power of Great Britain in world affairs. Lord Milner, for example, was unequivocal when he said in 1906 that '[t]his country must remain a great Power or she will become a poor country'. To do so, he argued, it was necessary that Britain become Greater Britain, by which he meant Britain and

⁶³ Robert Pearce, 'Imperial and Commonwealth History', in *Modern British History*, ed. by L. J. Butler and Anthony Gorst (London, 1997), p.202.

⁶⁴ A. K. Chesterton, *Sound the Alarm! A Warning to the British Nation* (Croydon, 1954), p. 3.

⁶⁵ J. E. Jenkins, 'Imperial Federalism', *Contemporary Review*, 16 (1871), quoted in Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 32.

her white Dominions acting together in some form of economic and political union.⁶⁶ Milner's ideas about the development of the Empire, that not only the closer union of the Dominions should be brought about, but also that Britain had a responsibility to develop the dependent colonies,⁶⁷ are direct antecedents of the League of Empire Loyalists' second and third constitutional objectives set in 1954.

A further example of the League's thinking that was derived from earlier imperialists' ideas is Seeley's perception that Russia and the USA were a threat to British power and also examples of how Britain could retain its status as a great Power. Modern developments in communications and transport had enabled these two 'vast political unions' to emerge. If Britain did not expand likewise, thus becoming Greater Britain, Russia and America would 'completely dwarf' Britain⁶⁸ who would thus be 'reduce[d] to the level of a purely European Power looking back...to the great days when she pretended to be a world-state'.⁶⁹ The threatened fulfilment of Seeley's prediction was what Chesterton was to rail against sixty years later.

The idea of Greater Britain pervaded imperial activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and had been supported by the Imperial Federation League and the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee.⁷⁰ It certainly cannot, however, be said to have been pervasive when the League of Empire Loyalists was active, but nevertheless it was propounded by Chesterton in his pamphlet *Tomorrow: A Plan for the British Future* which he wrote in the early 1960s. Nineteenth century imperial thinkers supported various incompletely defined versions of Greater Britain and, subsequently, Chesterton too was vague about his plan for Britain and her white Dominions, but the important point here is that Chesterton persisted with an anachronistic idea that was first formulated decades before, and which had been seen, in both its political form in the 1890s, and later in its economic form in 1906 to be unfeasible (though imperial preference was, at last, introduced in the 1930s).

⁶⁶ Alfred Milner, *The Nation and the Empire* (London, 1913), pp. 140-142.

⁶⁷ Milner, *The Nation and the Empire*, p. 292.

⁶⁸ J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*, (London, 1895), p. 89.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 350.

⁷⁰ Greater Britain had several meanings: the 'totality of the British Empire'; 'the settlement colonies' [i.e. the Dominions]; and 'the Anglo-Saxon countries' including USA, but its usual meaning was the settler colonies (Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 7.). Milner used it in that usual sense.

Additionally, Chesterton was in favour of the radical idea that the white Dominions should be separated from the rest of the Commonwealth and this plan is an echo of Milner's preference for the Dominions, or the self-governing colonies as they were commonly called at the time. At the Royal Colonial Institute in 1908 he declared:⁷¹

If I had to choose between an effective union of the self-governing states of the Empire without the dependent states, and the retention of the dependent states accompanied by complete separation from the distant communities of our own blood and language, I should choose the former.

This was a view that arose from a perception that the Empire comprised two distinctive parts: the self-governing colonies and the dependent colonies. Furthermore, Milner, Seeley and others believed that the self-governing colonies, i.e. the Dominions, were superior to the dependent colonies. It was a belief that had racial connotations and it forms another connection between Chesterton and his imperialist antecedents. It is important, however, to understand that the racist beliefs of Chesterton were very different from those of earlier imperialists. The former expressed an aggressive, abusive racism that denigrated non-white peoples, whereas the latter belief was a patriotic view of a superior white civilisation (that is, the people of Great Britain, or England, as it was commonly referred to) that had a duty to protect and nurture local people in the British dependencies who were deemed to be incapable, for decades to come, of governing themselves.

As Bell has observed, this nineteenth century racist view of the British Empire was regularly expressed by imperial thinkers and others. They believed that there was a 'natural [biological] superiority of white Europeans over their colonial subjects'.⁷² Biological or not, the superiority of British civilisation justified rule over people of much less advanced accomplishments and it was right and proper that the British undertook this civilising mission. The British were, in the words of Joseph Chamberlain, spoken in 1895, 'the greatest of the governing races that the world has ever seen'.⁷³ In Africa, for example, dependent colonies were not mere possessions; perceptions of ownership had been replaced by a 'sense of obligation' to undertake

⁷¹ Milner, *The Nation and the Empire*, p. 293.

⁷² Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 114.

⁷³ Joseph Chamberlain, 'Speech at the Imperial Institute, 11 November 1895', in *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947*, ed. by George Bennett (London, 1953), pp. 315-316 (p. 315).

the ‘work of civilis[ing]’ the local people.⁷⁴ Thus the ‘fact’ of white racial superiority should, it was believed, be used to the benefit of subject races. Lord Milner concurred: white Europeans were obliged to rule the black races because it was the only way by which the latter could be raised to a higher level of civilisation.⁷⁵

The other part of the British Empire, the self-governing colonies, was also perceived in a racial way, but one that was quite different. It recognised racial similarity, not difference. ‘Our chief duty [to them is] to give effect to that sentiment of kinship [that is] deep in the heart of every Briton...a closer union between all members of the British race’, declared Joseph Chamberlain in a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute in 1897.⁷⁶ Charles Dilke refers to ‘the Anglo-Saxon of the future...not everywhere be[ing] the same...but essentially the race continues everywhere to be ours’;⁷⁷ and it was, in the opinion of Milner, ‘the ‘affinity of race’ that was the strongest factor in the cohesion of Britain and its self-governing colonies.’⁷⁸ This closer union of the white Dominions is echoed in the slogan of *Candour*, the League’s paper, which declared each week that it existed ‘[t]o serve as a link between Britons all over the world to protest against the surrender of their world heritage’. The League’s racist imperialism, however, was much more virulent; the superiority of white Britain, Chesterton argued, meant that black people, for example, should not be permitted to govern themselves and should be prevented from settling in Britain. Conversely, the question of settling in Britain was immaterial in Milner’s day but he, unlike Chesterton, believed that the colonies should be enabled to arrive at self-government.

It is the malign denigration of black Africa that is a defining element of the League’s imperialism and distinguishes it from the late Victorian and Edwardian racially imperialistic views described earlier. Chesterton never emphasised Britain’s civilising mission or the potential of Africans to govern themselves. Black Africans,

⁷⁴ Joseph Chamberlain, ‘Speech at the Royal Colonial Institute Dinner, 31 March 1897’, in *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947*, ed. by George Bennett (London, 1952), pp. 317-320 (p. 319).

⁷⁵ Bennett p. 343.

⁷⁶ Joseph Chamberlain, ‘Speech at the Royal Colonial Institute Dinner’, p. 320.

⁷⁷ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain* (London, 1890), p. 579.

⁷⁸ Alfred, Lord Milner, ‘Address to the Royal Colonial Institute, 16 June 1908’, in *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947*, ed. by George Bennett (London, 1953), pp. 359-360 (p. 359).

he asserted, were barbaric, stone-age people who could not be trusted with power.⁷⁹ Any moves towards granting them independence should be vigorously opposed. When the Bishop of Johannesburg publicly declared to a meeting in Oxford that ‘the day of White supremacy in Africa was at an end’, Chesterton denounced him as a traitor to ‘the cause of civilisation in Africa’.⁸⁰ It was, however, not merely a question of preventing the participation of black people in their own governance in Africa. Chesterton also adamantly opposed black immigration in Britain, thereby revealing that his attitude was not based on grounds of superior competence of governance but on pure racism.

The corollary to this racist view of black Africans was the League’s policy towards the white Dominions, a policy similar in some ways to that of its imperial antecedents but which also had important differences. The League argued that the ‘British nations’ should be integrated, without explaining in detail how this might be achieved. This vagueness differed from the specific plans of nineteenth century imperial federalists; their difficulty was that they had too many versions of how integration should come about and were therefore fragmented. Another difference between the two imperial eras was their respective perceptions of contemporary geopolitical threat. Earlier imperialists, as we have seen, were concerned with the growing economic and political strength of *nations*: Germany, Russia and the USA. The League was virulently opposed to *internationalism*, manifested by the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank. Thus Chesterton wrote that ‘the United Nations [is] in essence a conspiracy against my Sovereign and Her people...’⁸¹ and his colleague Aidan Mackey argued that Britain’s politicians should put the interests of Britain first, the Empire second and international bodies last.⁸² Above all, the League abhorred the plans for European integration that gathered force in the 1950s: any supranational or intergovernmental institution that threatened British power and sovereignty must be vigorously opposed. In spite of these differences, brought about to some extent by the changing nature of international politics, a common theme of imperialists of both eras was a sense of Britishness and British power and sovereignty that was dependent on the Empire.

⁷⁹ *Candour*, 5 November 1954, pp. 1-2; 18 February 1955 p. 5; and 25 February 1955 pp. 1-2.

⁸⁰ *Candour*, 20 May 1955 p. 4.

⁸¹ *Candour*, 18 March 1955 p. 2.

⁸² *Candour*, 11 March 1955 p. 8.

Throughout the period, some imperial activists believed that Britain and her white Dominions comprised a scattered British nation that fell short of the global power of which it was capable because it was not a single state. This lack of congruency of state and nation, they argued, was a limiting factor in Britain's influence over world events. In other words, an extended nationality without an extension of the state brought 'no increase in political power', according to Seeley.⁸³ It is the desire for the congruency of the world-wide British nation and state that is an essential ingredient of many of the campaigns of imperial pressure groups from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, whether it be sought through political, economic or cultural means. It emphasises the institutions of the state and the common nationality, language and interests of the people. Conversely, it often fails to recognise the importance of minor nationalities, such as the French in Canada, the Dutch in South Africa and indigenous peoples. It can also overlook the centrifugal effects of the lack of contiguity, although Dilke, unlike Seeley, was alert to them.⁸⁴ This notion of an extended British nationalism and sovereignty comprising Britain and her Dominions that needed to develop common institutions of the state, is another theme in which there were connections between the ideas of Victorian and Edwardian imperialists and those of the League of Empire Loyalists.

One of the undoubted common institutions was the monarchy. For Milner, the throne, combined with the flag and common citizenship, was 'a [link] of inestimable value' that bound the Empire together.⁸⁵ This was a belief fully shared by Chesterton who believed that the Queen was central to the survival of the Empire. Chesterton also expressed his imperial thoughts in strong nationalistic terms that would have been recognised by Seeley. He opposed the power and influence of international bodies but saw the need for Britain to cooperate with other countries but only if they were part of what he called the British nation. By combining this nation with common institutions of state, Chesterton was arguing for the same polity as Seeley who saw the white Dominions and Britain not as an Empire but as 'a very

⁸³ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, p. 54.

⁸⁴ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, p. 495.

⁸⁵ Alfred, Lord Milner, 'Speech to the Manchester Conservative Club, 14 December 1906', in *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947*, ed. by George Bennett (London, 1953), pp. 351-353 (p. 352).

large state' capable of matching Russia, Germany and the USA.⁸⁶ Seeley's aim, however, lost favour during the Edwardian period and was replaced by the idea of a multinational commonwealth.⁸⁷ Chesterton's support for a theoretical polity whose realisation had been seen to be unattainable several decades earlier again illustrates his anachronistic and deeply conservative imperial ideas. Another, the idea that the people of Greater Britain were of one nationality that was common in late Victorian times, according to Bell, was also a central part of Chesterton's imperial vision over fifty years later. Also central to his anachronistic imperialism was the belief that the 'independence of the British nation' could only be secured through 'Imperial economic cooperation'.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Historians have commonly regarded the League of Empire Loyalists as an extreme right-wing organisation with fascist characteristics. There is some validity in this perception but it masks the true essence of the League, that it was a group of anachronistic imperial activists who looked back to the beginning of the twentieth century when Britain and her Empire was a powerful geopolitical force. Even at the apotheosis of Empire, metropolitan politicians had forebodings about the fragmentation of the Empire and so sought to strengthen its coherence. The imperialism of Chesterton and the League was a late manifestation, *mutatis mutandis*, of these early forebodings and, as before, was a response to threats to British sovereignty and power. Britain, the League and its antecedents believed, was intrinsically and racially superior to other nations and yet that superiority was under threat from international institutions such as the World Bank, NATO and the IMF in the middle of the twentieth century and from rival nation-states at the beginning of the century. The way to retain global prestige and power was to retain and unite the Empire.

The League believed that British imperialism was the *sine qua non* of Britishness; without an empire there could be no worthwhile Britishness. It believed that the Empire it wished to preserve consisted of three parts: Britain itself,

⁸⁶ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, p. 350.

⁸⁷ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, p. 118.

⁸⁸ *Candour*, 10 December 1954 p. 1.

unadulterated by black immigration; the imagined community of white kith and kin in the Dominions; and the black colonies, incapable of self-government. This was a racial view of empire whose connections with the racial attitudes of late Victorian and Edwardian imperial activists have been discussed in this chapter. For the earlier imperialists and for the League, to lose any part of the Empire, or to fail to bring about greater cohesion, was deplorable and represented a loss of British power and sovereignty that was destructive of Britishness itself. Robert Pearce's suggestion that the League can only be fully understood by connecting it to earlier imperial activists is perceptive. If Chesterton and the League had somehow been transposed to the beginning of the twentieth century their arguments would have been more pertinent and apposite but because 'the needle had become stuck' (to use David Baker's metaphor describing Chesterton's fascism) they repeated, over and over again, lost and anachronistic arguments. Chesterton and the League kept steadfastly, wittingly or not, to ideas formulated at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth.

Chapter 7. Caring about the British Empire

The preceding chapters have described a gallimaufry of groups, some briefly, and two others, largely overlooked by historians, in detail. From this medley of imperial activism it is appropriate to suggest, by addressing some key questions, general conclusions about awareness of the Empire in Britain in the twentieth century. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the fundamental question of who cared about the Empire has been considered by historians such as Bernard Porter, John Mackenzie, Richard Price and others and will be explored further in this chapter from the perspective of imperial groups. There are, however, other questions which are important to consider. What motivated individuals to become involved in imperial groups? What specific issues and imperial themes did they value? How did their interests change over time? How salient in Britain was active concern about, and interest in, the Empire? And how do the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists fit into the overall milieu of imperial activism? Addressing these matters forms the substance of this chapter.

It is important to distinguish between what the British Empire actually was and how it was perceived or ‘imagined’, in Benedict Anderson’s sense of the word, by imperial activists.¹ In discussing the question of who cared about empire, therefore, we need to consider the expression ‘British Empire’ and what it meant. In their authoritative history of the word ‘imperialism’, R. Koebner and H.D. Schmidt discuss its changing meaning between 1840 and 1960.² This encompasses the period under consideration here and, thus, in coming to terms with the question of perceiving and caring about the British Empire, their work provides a valuable source for enquiring into the various ways imperial activists did so. Imperial activists in Britain, it will be argued, did not see the British Empire as a monolith whose every aspect should be unchangingly embraced. They were generally selective, addressing specific imperial themes, and often reflected, sometimes helped to create, and occasionally opposed, the changing debates and meanings of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Early imperial activist groups and the meaning of empire

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* ([xxx]).

² Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*.

Koebner and Schmidt have shown that by 1865:

the three major issues between Britain and her colonies—self-government, the abolition of the old colonial trade system, and colonial defence—gave the term Empire a new prominence and a more definite meaning in the minds of statesmen, politicians and colonial administrators who debated them...[However] there was little evidence to show that the wider public showed an interest in the new meaning of Empire or its substance.³

Although public awareness of this new meaning of Empire grew in the ensuing years, in 1865 it was only ‘public men’ who were interested in the concept. One of these public men was Joseph Howe, a Canadian politician, who in 1866, two years before the RCI was founded, described in a pamphlet how the British Empire had been ‘got together’ over a long period. The recurrent question now, he wrote, was ‘what is now to be done with it’.⁴ This question continued to be addressed by the imperial groups described in Chapter 1, in various ways, for the next one hundred years.

Although defence and trade were long-standing imperial issues, the ‘new meaning’ of the Empire emphasised relations between Great Britain and its self-governing colonies, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Its essence was a desire to draw more closely together the parts of the Empire that had common descent, race, religion, language and values. A number of upper-middle class political or academic men were prominent in this debate about imperial integration. Charles Dilke in *Greater Britain* (1868) suggested that the Empire was the ‘English-speaking, white-inhabited, and self-governed lands’⁵; J.R. Seeley in *Expansion of England* (1883) described the ‘Colonial Empire’ as ‘an enlargement of the English state’⁶; and J. A. Froude in *Oceana* (1885) argued that there was a ‘strong...sentimental attachment to Britain...among the colonists’.⁷ It would be wrong, however, to assert unequivocally that only the self-governing colonies mattered. For example, in 1876 Disraeli showed the imperial relevance of India by proposing that the Queen be designated Empress of India but nevertheless some

³ Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, p. 80.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain* (London, 1868), Vol. 2, p. 149.

⁶ Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, p. 173.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 182.

perceived the eastern Empire as peopled by aliens, unlike the self-governing, settler colonies whose populations were seen as English (thereby, it should be noted, ignoring the aborigines in Australasia, the French in Canada, and the Dutch and black people in South Africa). It was against this background, in a period when the Empire was equated by many people with the British settler colonies, that the Imperial Federation League (IFL) came into being in 1884. Its pursuit of imperial federation embraced only the settler colonies and the Colonial Conference it was influential in organising in 1887 confined the Crown Colonies to the opening session and excluded them and India from its substantive sessions.⁸ The Indian element of the Empire had moved into the background. Thus, 'Empire', insofar as one attempted actively to answer Joseph Howe's question, was identified with Anglo-Saxon British settlers. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, the territorial nature of the Empire changed; in twenty years, Britain acquired 37 new territories in Africa and Asia with a total native population of 95 million.⁹

According to Koebner and Schmidt, the African acquisitions 'made a purely Anglo-Saxon view of Empire somewhat obsolete' and yet they argue that they were not seen as important to the Empire and failed to 'rouse wide enthusiasm in England' at that time.¹⁰ Certainly, the evidence of imperial groups supports the latter view. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century six imperial groups were founded and of these only the Imperial South African Association had a particular interest in Africa. Of the remaining five, the IFL disbanded in 1893 having failed to progress its agenda of promoting imperial unity; its successors, the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee, the British Empire League and the United Empire Trade League had defence, imperial unity and trade respectively as their special interests. The Primrose League's imperialism was not its main preoccupation but an essential part of its torism. Its total official enrolments (not live membership) reached over one million by 1900, probably an exaggerated figure, and membership of the other groups, who practised a much more focussed form of imperial activism, probably did not total more than a few thousands. In terms of imperialist activist groups, therefore,

⁸ The business meetings of the conference were attended by representatives of Britain, Newfoundland, Canada, New South Wales, Tasmania, Cape of Good Hope, South Australia, New Zealand, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Natal.

⁹ Derived from J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London, 1902), p. 17.

¹⁰ Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, pp. 196-205.

we may reasonably conclude that Africa and the new Asian acquisitions, insofar as they did not form part of India perhaps, were almost irrelevant in the 1880s and early 1890s. One might go further and suggest that the imperial conference in 1887 and the new wave of British acquisitions were not accompanied by an increase in the number of people who actively cared especially deeply about the British Empire. This relatively quiet period of imperial activism, however, was, according to Koebner and Schmidt, followed by a ‘remarkably sudden...surge of imperial sentiment in 1898’, ‘a climax in popular enthusiasm for imperialism’. The origins of this surge lay in increased international rivalries (manifested by specific incidents such as Fashoda and Omdurman); feelings of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority; and a sense of moral obligation towards backward people. There were two separate parts to the Empire: ‘one...white and British; the other...coloured and backward’, according to the Liberal MP J.L. Walton. Joseph Chamberlain also argued that Britain’s African and Asian possessions had created a greater sense of obligation, but added, more materialistically, that they offered increased opportunities for trade.¹¹ We see here the presence of the classic themes of the British Empire: Anglo-Saxon imperial unity; defence; and trade.

Notwithstanding the abrupt increase in imperial sentiment in 1898 it was not sustained; Koebner and Schmidt also identify 1898 as the year in which ‘revulsion against imperialism began... [reaching] its climax in the Boer War’.¹² This statement is not contradictory; growth in sentiment can be followed by its immediate decline. As Trevor Lloyd has observed, however, the level of imperial sentiment at the time was capable of exaggeration and interest in the Empire was not ‘commonplace’.¹³ Analysis of the creation of new imperial activist groups in the years between 1898 and 1914 may help in understanding the fluctuating nature of imperial sentiment at that time. Arguably the higher level of imperial sentiment attained in 1898, with its new interest in Africa and Asia, was widespread but not deeply rooted and not of great interest to imperial activist groups.

¹¹ Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, pp. 210-217.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 250.

¹³ T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1983*, (Oxford, 1984), pp. 240-241.

None of the ten groups formed in that period and discussed in Chapter 1 had a predominant interest in Africa or Asia. Their main area of interest was in the self-governing colonies. It may therefore be that the new imperial acquisitions were simply noted but not seen as areas about which any particular practical action or interest need be taken by activists. It seems clear that the primary focus of imperial groups remained the self-governing colonies and how they might be integrated with Britain in terms of governance, defence or trade. In addition to these themes, education and sentiments of kith and kin were developed, the former by organisations such as The League of the Empire and the Empire Day Movement and the latter by the Overseas Club and The Patriotic League of Britons Overseas. Nor was it always mere indifference to Africa and Asia. The Victoria League, as noted in Chapter 1, was uncomfortable about dealing with Indian matters. Conversely, for example, Joseph Chamberlain argued that the British Empire was more than ties of kith and kin. Britain, he believed, had a civilising mission in its ‘backward’ territories as well as important trading opportunities. These ideas, however, do not appear to have formed a significant part of the agenda of imperial activist groups in the Edwardian era even in the Tariff Reform League, founded in 1903, in which Chamberlain played a leading role. The Empire Parliamentary Association, founded in 1911, confined its membership to the Dominions, only later admitting members from India, Ceylon and Southern Rhodesia, for example. The Round Table also concentrated its affairs on the Dominions; *they* were the powers who would pursue the ‘master theme’ of developing an imperial defence and foreign policy. All these new groups’ priorities are evidence that at the beginning of the twentieth century the meaning of ‘British Empire’ from the perspective of imperial activists remained predominantly Anglo-Saxon. Is it possible to reconcile the apparent divergence between a general surge in imperial sentiment about the British Empire, with its newly acquired territories, and the particular emphasis of activist groups on the Empire’s Anglo-Saxon areas?

‘Hot’ and ‘banal’ imperialism

The degree to which different elements of society were aware of the Empire, reacted to events related to it, and cared about it are factors that determine the salience of imperial sentiment. Thus, for example, those who were aware of the Empire but were uninterested in it, or indifferent to it, would be less likely to

participate in any surge in imperial sentiment. However, an increase in imperial sentiment would be capable of arising from the section of the population which had a mild or latent, supportive, interest in the Empire. Incidents like those at Omdurman and Fashoda would be capable of increasing their awareness of empire and arousing imperialistic patriotic feelings. They may result in displays of 'hot' imperialism analogous to what Michael Billig has called 'hot' nationalism.¹⁴ As the topicality and intensity of an incident fades so people return to 'banal' imperialism and, in the examples given, Africa fades from general public imperial consciousness. Such attenuation of imperial sentiment does not apply so strongly to imperial activist groups; they continue to pursue their imperial objectives but a few of them, however, are exponents of 'banal' imperialism. The concept of 'banal *nationalism*' has been developed by Michael Billig in his eponymous book and arguably his idea is capable of extension to imperialism. This may be particularly apposite if the form of the imperialism is one in which the predominant perception of empire is that of Britain and its Dominions. The Junior Imperial League, founded in 1906, is an example of this.

In Chapter 4 the discussion of the strength of the JIL's imperialism concentrated mainly on the manifest, open examples of its imperialism. It was suggested, however, that Empire was so much a given part of the JIL's ethos that it became such an accepted and understood element of members' beliefs that it did not need to be referred to often in the course of the League's everyday activities. 'Empire' for many JIL members was thus commonplace, or 'banal'. Billig's work on the banality of nationalism helps to understand the nature of the JIL's imperialism. He draws attention to the underlying, 'mundane' activities and signals that denote the almost unnoticed presence of nationalism. They are the ideological habits, he writes, that 'reproduce' or sustain nationalism. However, understandably, he does not extend his analysis beyond nationalism.

One cannot here attempt a comprehensive enquiry into the nature and meaning of nationalism and its use as a basis for connecting it to imperialism. However, the definition provided by Ernest Renan provides an analytical framework:

¹⁴ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 43.

‘to have had common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation’.¹⁵ It looks back to a common, imagined, past of shared experiences that binds people together even if, or perhaps because, they are dispersed. This idea need not apply exclusively to a nation. It is also relevant to groups of people at sub-national level such as a village, county or region. Thus if it is capable of such extension down the scale of social groups, then might it not also apply to an empire, or at least parts of an empire populated by people with strong common features such as race, language and religion? Within the British Empire the clear example of this is Britain and the Dominions; in the late-nineteenth century expressions such as ‘Greater Britain’ and the ‘Expansion of England’ described this extended nationalism. Renan’s elements of a nation may thus, wittingly or not, have been present in the minds of those who sought imperial unity: Greater Britain could be, they perceived, an extended nation. Such a perception helps to explain why the great majority of imperial interest groups placed emphasis in their imperial objectives and activities on the Dominions. An Anglo-Saxon, metropolitan individual living in a strongly national environment could perceive an affinity with another Anglo-Saxon individual living in, say, Australia or Canada more readily than with an Ashanti gold miner, for example, although, once again, one has to overlook non-Anglo-Saxon minorities in doing so.¹⁶ A people that sees itself as having common ethnicity, however diffusely spread, may generally have a greater chance of experiencing feelings of a common past than a geographically compact multi-racial group. Thus, it is as if the ties of common experience and ethnicity, even when located in non-contiguous areas can be more strongly bound together by the notion of an empire-state than by the idea of a nation-state; national unity is replaced, or at least extended, by imperial unity. The words of perhaps the most popular of all British imperial songs express this: ‘land of hope and glory...wider still and wider may thy bounds be set’. It follows, therefore, that Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ can be extended to ‘banal imperialism’ and help to explain what was referred to in Chapter

¹⁵ Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, p. 17.

¹⁶ Jonathan Rose, in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (p. 363), notes that a Mass Observation poll in 1948 found that 17% of those surveyed could not name a single country of the Empire. Dominions were identified by the following percentages: Australia (78%); Canada (67%); New Zealand (52%); South Africa (40%).

4 as the JIL's weak imperialism.¹⁷ The term 'weak' can now be replaced by 'banal' in the case of the JIL. What, however, does Billig mean by 'banal' and how does the JIL illustrate its meaning in an imperial context?

Billig uses the idea of 'waved' and 'unwaved' flags in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Nationalism, he argues, is not simply an extreme or aggressive concept. It can exist in everyday ways that are almost unnoticed to the extent that its 'flaggings', that is, its clear, as well as its subtle, manifestations, 'continually remind us that we are 'us' and, in so doing, permit us to forget that we are being reminded'.¹⁸ Such a process brings about the reproduction, the long-term sustaining, of the nation. He describes the wide range of meanings that can be assigned to 'we' and 'us' and the ways in which groups identify with these pronouns. If one sets this idea alongside that of Benedict Anderson, the imagined community, one can postulate that it is possible that a form of banal imperialism can apply to a geographically diffuse group of people with a perceived common ancestry such as the populations of Great Britain and her Dominions. It is an imperialism which focuses on this particular geographical configuration but does so in everyday, unnoticed ways; in other words, ways that are taken for granted within the group. Thus, '[b]anal nationalism possesses a low key, understated tone...[with] routine practices'.¹⁹ This quotation, if 'nationalism' is replaced with 'imperialism', describes the JIL. Certainly, the JIL also had its incidents of 'hot' imperialism such as its campaign against the reform of Indian governance but banal imperialism was its normal condition. It is this that clearly distinguishes it from all the other groups discussed in this thesis, with the exception of the Primrose League. The characteristics that define the two organisations are that their activities were strongly social, not exclusively political, and that they had a general, not specific, interest in the British Empire. Other groups were far more political in their imperial beliefs and tended to focus 'hotly' and persistently on their particular imperial objectives.

¹⁷ Krishan Kumar has used the term 'banal imperialism' in 'Empire, Nation and National Identities', in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Andrew Thompson (Oxford, 2012), pp. 298-329. He states, in passing, that '[j]ust as there is banal nationalism, there can also be "banal imperialism"' (p. 301).

¹⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 175.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 155.

The banal imperialism of the JIL was evident in the activities of its members in its branches. It was there that the continual, almost unnoticed, reminding (to use Billig's terms) of Empire occurred. Members of branches had interests in a mixture of social and political activities and the exact proportions varied from branch to branch, sometimes controversially, as discussed in Chapter 4. It is reasonable to assume, however, unless they set out deliberately to misrepresent themselves, that despite these multifarious activities, about which they could be selective, members had a common, almost mandatory, belief in Conservative and Unionist principles. They were, after all, required on joining the League to declare their acceptance of them. One such key principle was the preservation of the British Empire. Furthermore the JIL badge contained the motto 'For Empire', a constant reminder of the League's imperial ethos. It is worth noting that these aspects of the JIL were similar to those of the Primrose League which also exhibited banal imperialism. Its slogan was *Imperium et Libertas* and it sought to exclude from membership those who were hostile to the British Empire. It too had a strong social element to its activities and the JIL demonstrated its kindred nature when it adopted the Primrose League's song book for use at its social events. Songs such as 'Soldiers of the Queen', and 'The Bold Menelaus' (by Henry Newbolt)²⁰, with their references to 'ruling the waves' and 'a famous fighting race', were tuneful expressions of British imperial power and military might. Together with membership being conditional on acceptance of imperialism, and with slogans and badges, they were the everyday, barely noticed, manifestations of banal imperialism. To borrow Billig's words, members of the JIL thus recalled the Empire almost 'without conscious awareness... [whilst] doing other things',²¹ a form of anoetic imperialism perhaps that follows in the tradition of Macaulay, in whose five volume history of England, published in the middle of the nineteenth century, the British Empire is 'scarcely mentioned' because it is a 'fundamental but unstated assumption'.²²

It would be wrong to conclude that the JIL was solely banal in its imperialism. It also had its moments of 'hot' imperialism but these were much more likely to occur at central meetings rather than in the branches. The speeches by

²⁰ Henry Newbolt, *San Stefano A Ballad of the Bold Menelaus*.

²¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 42.

²² Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven and London, 2012), p. xvi.

Baldwin to JIL rallies in 1924 and 1928, discussed in Chapter 4, illustrate this. Renderings of *Land of Hope and Glory* and other patriotic songs, the mass waving of red, white and blue placards and the loud cheers that greeted Baldwin's assertion that the League was 'not afraid of the word Empire' are powerful evidence of this. Such events were certainly not without conscious awareness. They were full-blooded, stirring, imperial events, quite unlike the everyday activities in JIL branches, at which the British Empire was emotionally and whole-heartedly celebrated. The contrast with branch activity may help to explain the normal, banal expression of members' imperialism. Membership of the League in its branches was a pastime, a relatively small part of members' everyday lives and therefore the Empire was not something that preoccupied their minds. Such circumstances are conducive to the quiet, low key celebration of Empire. Members did not generally use their time with the League in trying to reform or exploit the Empire, as did, for example, the activists of the Tariff Reform League. In general, they wanted to enjoy and celebrate the Empire, not to change it. There were exceptions to this, however. Campaigns in favour of imperial preference and against Indian self-governance in the 1930s were certainly not banal but were manifestations of the League's 'hot' imperialism. The relative rarity of such militancy in the JIL's activities, however, helps to reinforce the conclusion that the JIL's normal mode was one of 'banal' imperialism.

It is the banal imperialism of the JIL that makes it important not to overlook it in assessing the nature of imperialism in Britain in the twentieth century. Bernard Porter has warned against exaggerating 'the imperialization of British society and culture by...ignoring the bare patches and bunching the imperial 'finds' together'.²³ Conversely, however, it is equally important not to ignore imperial activity because of its banality, as historians have done in the case of the JIL. To do so leads to over-emphasis on 'hot' imperialism and thus a distorted understanding of the full nature and limits of imperial activism. Within the spectrum of imperial activism, the JIL represents what might be termed infra-imperialism, as distinct from the upper-limit, of ultra-imperialism, set by the League of Empire Loyalists, of which more later. It is this aspect of the JIL and its banal imperialism that make it important in the study of the salience of imperialism in Britain in the twentieth century. Together, the JIL and

²³ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 309.

the LEL delimit the full spectrum of imperial activism. Before, however, considering the way in which the LEL performs this role, the next part of the chapter returns to the chronological discussion of imperial groups within the context of changing meanings of empire.

Later imperial activist groups and the meaning of empire

The Women's Guild of Empire was formed in 1914. The significance of the WGE in imperial activism is that it was a working-class organisation, not that it involved women; they had already been active in the Primrose League and the Victoria League for some years previously. Although the exact nature of its activities is obscure it claimed a membership of 40,000 and is valuable evidence of working-class interest in the Empire. Historians, such as Richard Price, have argued that the working class was not much interested in the Empire.²⁴ That the WGE was the only imperial group with a predominantly working-class membership supports this view but the size of its membership was substantial relative to that of most imperial groups and shows that active working-class interest in the Empire cannot be completely ignored. Many working-class people voted Tory, the party of the Empire, and it may well be that their absence from organised imperial groups was due to lack of money and leisure time. They may even have been discouraged from joining by the attitudes, for example, of middle-class members in groups such as the JIL, discussed in Chapter 3.

Many of the imperial groups formed before the First World War continued to exist during (and beyond) it and some combined in welcoming and assisting the hundreds of thousands of troops from the Empire who came to Britain. Some gave direct military assistance: the British Empire League raised a cavalry regiment (the 2nd King Edward's Horse) and equipped five army units; another raised funds to finance the building of a warship. This was imperial defence in practice, not theorising about how the defence of the Empire could be formally financed and integrated, one of the early themes of imperial groups' campaigning. Furthermore, in a period of intense military conflict, one might expect that the defence of the British Empire and the practicalities of war would crowd out new campaigns to

²⁴ Richard Price, *An imperial war and the British Working class: working class attitudes and reaction to the Boer War, 1899-1902*, (Oxford, 1966).

reform it but this was not the case. Three imperial groups were founded during the First World War: the Empire Resources Development Committee, the British Commonwealth Union and the British Empire Union. They were small or medium-sized political pressure groups mainly interested in trade in the Empire and adjusted their policies to the context of the war: the BEU was racially anti-German and the ERDC saw imperial trade as a means of reducing the war debt. The idea of greater cooperation in imperial trade was a persistent one and was the most long-lived of all the imperial themes. It is perhaps significant that Lord Curzon felt it necessary to challenge this dominant role in imperial activism in 1907 when he rejected the idea that imperialism could be identified with commercial activities.²⁵ The perceived necessity of denial can sometimes signal that what is being denied is indeed the case. By 1918 the concept of imperial unity was a dead question: the Dominions had attained a new geo-political sense of independent national maturity as exemplified by their attendance at the Versailles peace conference. The question of more integrated imperial defence was no longer a matter of theoretical debate; the reality of war had seen the Dominions acting in concert just as they had done in the Boer War, an outcome that had delighted Joseph Chamberlain and helped to motivate his drive for tariff reform. After 1918, economic imperialism was an established fact²⁶ and it was a major part of imperial activism in Britain in the inter-war years.

Immediately after the First World War the British Empire reached its greatest geographical spread; it had acquired mandated territories and not yet granted independence to Ireland. This coincided, however, with a widespread agreement in global political thinking that 'imperialism' was now a 'condemnatory' word in 'the struggle against capitalism...Anglo-Saxon domination, and...white, colonial power'.²⁷ Furthermore, two of the pre-war imperial themes, imperial federation and institutionalised long-term cooperation in defence matters, were dead issues after the war. The First World War had shown that the Dominions were capable of responding to the war effort without any need for pre-arranged formal imperial structures: a million men enlisted from the Dominions. Their participation also brought greater maturity in international affairs as, for example, when they demanded, and achieved,

²⁵ Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, p. 261.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 272.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 279.

their own representatives at the Paris peace talks.²⁸ Elsewhere, domination and power were certainly issues in the drive between the wars for greater autonomy for India and two new imperial groups created in the interwar period, the Indian Empire Society and the India Defence League, considered British power as paramount in their campaigns against greater Indian autonomy. Three other new groups, the Empire Development Union, the Empire Industries Association and the Empire Crusade had imperial trade as their principal interest. As discussed in Chapter 1, the IES and IDL were small, short-lived political organisations. They were illustrative of specialised, particular imperial interests but were unable to divert the trend towards Indian independence. They are an early example of imperial activism opposing the emerging ‘meaning’ of the British Empire, the growing desire for independence, that was to be so virulently and more widely pursued by the League of Empire Loyalists after the Second World War. None of these organisations campaigned successfully. The EIA and Empire Crusade, however, were more effective organisations and pursued the last and most persistent of the themes of imperial activism, imperial preference in trade.

It would be wrong to attempt to be too definitive in attempting to summarise the nature of the specific issues and activities that imperial activists valued, and the manner in which their interests changed over time within the context of the changing meanings of the British Empire. One can, however, suggest some characteristics of organised interest in the British Empire that are more apparent than others.

Organised interest was low until the 1880s and grew rapidly between then and 1914. The Edwardian period was the most fertile period for the creation of imperial activist groups. The British Empire mattered to people more in that period than in any other in the twentieth century and it did so in all its specific themes of governance, defence, trade, and education as well as in more general ways that sought to enjoy and celebrate the Empire. Immediately after the First World War, imperial activism reached a peak both in terms of the number of organisations and their membership, although the largest organisation, the Primrose League, claiming

²⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: the Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War* (London, 2001), pp. 51-53.

800,000 members in 1914,²⁹ was in decline by the 1920s. Despite this peak of interest, the range of imperial themes was beginning to narrow. The notion of any form of imperial federation, which had been so dominant in the 1880s and 1890s, was now moribund. As Denis Judd has noted, a resolution passed by the Imperial War Conference in 1917, calling for a special conference after the war that would grant ‘full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations...spelt the end of the dreams of imperial federation’.³⁰ It was, however, for some activists, a long time expiring; the Round Table did not accept that the idea of imperial unity was ‘untenable’ until the late 1940s.³¹ The organisation of defence that permanently integrated the military resources of Britain and its Dominions was also of much less interest after the First World War. The decline of interest in these two imperial themes may have been because integrated governance and defence were difficult policies to pursue without creating supra-national organisations and pooling sovereignty. Like imperial federalism, they were too ‘abstract and undefined’³² to be realisable. This was not true, however, of trade relations and this is perhaps one reason why a desire for closer relations with the Dominions turned more strongly towards imperial preference in the 1920s. Certainly, emphasis on the Dominions was a continuation of the pre-war policy of the tariff reformers who ‘saw the empire in terms of the settler colonies’.³³ In 1931 imperial preference became a reality, albeit more because of the needs of the global economic situation than imperial activism.

A new topic of organised imperial activism, the campaign against increased self-governance for India, emerged briefly in the 1930s but failed to prevent the enactment of the India Bill in 1935. By now imperial activism was in decline and took on a more ‘general’ appreciation of the Empire rather than the persistent desire to reform or integrate it. Four groups ceased to exist in the 1930s and a further three in the 1940s, a decade in which no new groups were founded, the first time this had occurred since the 1870s. After the Second World War more groups were dissolved

²⁹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 168.

³⁰ Denis Judd, *Balfour and the British Empire: a Study in Imperial Evolution, 1874-1932* (London, 1968), p. 321.

³¹ May, ‘The Round Table’, p. 448.

³² *ibid.*, p. 447.

³³ Jim Tomlinson, ‘The Empire/Commonwealth in British Economic Thinking and Policy’, in *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Andrew Thompson (Oxford, 2012), pp. 211-250 (p. 238).

and those that remained had either a general interest in the Empire or were pursuing specific imperial educational matters in an administrative way rather than seeking reform. The period in which the Empire had mattered a great deal, the Edwardian years, and the inter-war years during which the earlier ideas of closer imperial union were seen to be chimerical, were followed by independence for India in 1947 and Macmillan's post-war pronouncement of the 'wind of change' in Africa in 1961. Having failed to integrate Britain and her Dominions more closely, those who cared about the Empire were thus made more pointedly aware of its further disintegration. Interest in the Empire remained among the general public but it depended on class: a survey in 1948 had shown that whereas only 15 per cent of unskilled workers had 'a high level of interest in the colonial matters', this rose to '54 per cent of the middle classes'.³⁴ It was early in these post-war years that the middle-class League of Empire Loyalists emerged anachronistically in 1954.

Table 15. Analysis of imperial activist groups by date and interest

	1860-1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s
No. founded	3	4	6	6	2	2	0	1	0	0
Dissolved	0	0	2	1	1	4	3	2	1	3
Cum. total	3	7	11	16	17	15	12	11	10	7
Area of interest:										
General	2	2	4	7	7	7	6	6	6	4
Governance	1	2	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
Trade	0	1	1	2	4	2	1	1	1	1
Defence	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trade and defence	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Governance and defence	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Education	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
'Kith and kin'	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Cum. total	3	7	11	16	17	15	12	11	10	7

³⁴ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 383.

Apart from the Expanding Commonwealth Group, an association of a few Conservative backbench MPs briefly described in Chapter 5, the LEL, led by A.K. Chesterton, was the only imperial activist group to be founded after the Second World War. As discussed in Chapter 6, the League's model of imperialism was old-fashioned and embedded in the imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its activist tactics, however, which were unlike those of any other imperialist group, identified it as an ultra-imperialist group. The pre-planned use of disruptive tactics at public meetings exploited the presence of the press and television in order to draw attention to the League's political message and was quite unlike the methods other imperial activist groups used to promulgate their policies.

Billig describes how certain national events, such as national days, coronations and thanksgiving days, can interrupt the banality of nationalism. The attention of the people is briefly drawn to its national identity and 'sentiments of patriotic emotion...surge forth' in 'hot' nationalism.³⁵ If one accepts the idea that imperialism can be a transcendent form of nationalism leading to the notion of 'banal imperialism', then it follows that Billig's 'hot nationalism' becomes 'hot imperialism' in the context of the British Empire. Although the activities of the LEL occurred long before the exposition of such terminology, Chesterton was, without being aware of the expression, an exponent of 'hot imperialism'. The numerous 'hot' events that the League organised, discussed in Chapter 5, were designed to draw the attention of people to their imperial identity. Chesterton used 'propaganda by deed' and the 'politics of disruption' to create 'hot imperialism' and thereby gain publicity. He was a master of disruptive political deeds in attempting to promulgate his imperial messages. No other imperial activist group used such tactics. Certainly, other imperial groups had their 'hot' events: the Empire Day Movement's annual celebration and the JIL's mass rallies are examples. No group, however, relied so heavily and persistently on 'hot imperialism' as did the LEL. It is this that differentiates it and places it at the extreme, ultra-imperialist, end of the imperial activist spectrum, far removed from the 'banal imperialism' of the JIL at the other end of the spectrum.

³⁵ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 45.

The LEL was active between 1953 and 1967, a period of rapid decolonisation in which the traditional imperial themes of governance, defence and trade were becoming increasingly irrelevant to the public. As Porter has observed about decolonisation: '[t]here was not much thought...given to what had gone, the old empire'.³⁶ Nor was much thought given even to the new Commonwealth. Evidence of such a trend can be seen in a speech in 1981 by S.S. Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretary General in which he argued that Britain seemed to be 'associated' with the Commonwealth but 'not of it'.³⁷ Thus any organisation, like the LEL, campaigning against this trend would seem to many people to be out-dated, irrational and fanatical. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that all imperial groups in existence after the war fitted this description. In the 1960s, the Royal Commonwealth Institute, the Primrose League, the Victoria League, the League of the Empire, the Round Table Group, the Empire Parliamentary Association and the Empire Industries Association were still active. All except the EIA had been founded before the First World War but had adapted to the changing imperial situation. Thus, for example, the Round Table Group, reviewing its circumstances in 1970, concluded that whereas its founders had sought to develop the increasing cohesion of 'political, military and economic order' in the Empire, now its task was to cultivate 'modest' associational relationships within the Commonwealth.³⁸ There is a paradox, therefore, in the fact that the newest imperial organisation, the LEL, never considered adapting to the times. Its beliefs were grounded in the Edwardian period and this magnified the extreme fanaticism it needed to gain public attention in imperial matters. To what extent, however, was the British public concerned with the British Empire? The total membership of imperial activist groups is very relevant to this question.

Assessing the membership of imperial activist groups

The variety of imperial groups in the period 1900 to 1970, delimited by such greatly different organisations as the JIL and the LEL, complicates a discussion of who joined imperial activist groups and why they did so. Perhaps for this reason, the membership of imperial activist groups has not been examined extensively by

³⁶ Porter, *The Lion's Share*, p. 277.

³⁷ *The Round Table*, 282 (April 1981), 176.

³⁸ *The Round Table*, 284 (October 1981), 328.

historians. There are difficulties in doing so because information is patchy and some organisations, such as the Primrose League, may have exaggerated membership numbers. It is important, nevertheless, to address the issue because those who joined imperial activist groups were a self-selecting body of people who cared about the British Empire and analysing how numerous they were, and who they were, provides useful information about how widespread interest in the Empire was among the people of Britain. Table 16 (below) provides some information about the membership of imperial activist groups drawn from various sources. (See Chapter 1.)

Table 16. Membership of imperial activist groups

Activist group	No. of members	Date	Source
RCI	13,700	1910	Reese, p134
Primrose League	656,269	1910	Pugh, p168
	800,000	1914	Pugh, p168
IFL			
IF(D)C	'rather small'	1894	Pollock, 'Imperial Organisation', 11
BEL			
UETL	5,100	1890s	<i>The Times</i> 24 June 1892
ISAA			
Victoria League	6,500	1915	Riedi, HJ p577
League of the Empire	23,000	1906	
Empire Day Movement			
TRL	Over 200,000	1913	Derived from Thompson PhD p47 and Summers p18
JIL	100,000	1912	HLRO CPA CCO506/1/1
	250,000	1929	JIL Annual Report 1928/29
Round Table Group			
Overseas Club	32,506	1922	Smith <i>The Royal Overseas League</i> pp141-2
	44,555	1933	
	58,261	1945	
	38,315	1967	
EPA	300	1913	Grey p7
	About 2000	1920s	Derived from Grey (passim.)
ERDC	Less than 1000	1920s	Derived from Bigland, p221
BCU	About 20	1917	Turner p535 in EHR
BEU	About 20,000	c.1919	Derived from BEU <i>Monthly Record</i>
WGE	40,000	1925	ODNB entry for Flora Drummond
EDU	'tiny'	1920s	Marrison p361
EIA	'small'	1920s	Marrison pp378-80
Empire Crusade	250,000	1929	<i>The Crusader</i> No 1 July 1930
IES	1,400	1933	<i>The Times</i> 19 January 1933
IDL	About 10,000	1933	Derived from <i>The Times</i> 8 December 1934
ECG	18	1950s	Biggs-Davison papers, HLRO BD/1/53
LEL	About 3,000	1958	Nugent, 'Post-war Fascism', 213

It is clear that the Primrose League was, by a wide margin, the largest of the groups. The exactness of the figure for its membership in 1910 (656,269) is the result of an audit of its active membership at that time as distinct from its official number of enrolments since its inception in 1884, stated in 1910 to be 2,053,019.³⁹ This latter figure included branch members who had died, resigned or moved away as well as the entire membership of defunct branches. One may conclude, therefore, that during a twenty-six year period over one million people who had at some point joined the Primrose League ceased to sustain an active part in its affairs. Furthermore, although Primrose League membership increased in the years immediately prior to the beginning of the First World War, reaching 800,000 by 1914⁴⁰ and suggesting a net annual average increase of about 40,000, such growth was not sustained in the inter-war years. In 1922, for example, the League reported only 21,653 new members and in 1935, just 5,637.⁴¹

The great majority of the membership of the League, about 92 per cent, was classified as Associates; the remaining 8 per cent, who led the League, were termed Knights and Dames. These latter were likely to be from the upper strata of society whereas the Associates were more likely to be middle and working class people. There are perhaps three main reasons why people joined the Primrose League: to support Tory politics; to show that they cared about the British Empire; and to enjoy social activities. Whatever relative importance one might assign to these motives, it is clear that the League's membership is evidence of caring about the Empire in *all* the social classes in Britain.

At the end of the Edwardian period, the two largest groups, after the Primrose League, were the Tariff Reform League and the Junior Imperial League with a combined membership of over 300,000. The membership in Britain of a third large group, the Overseas Club, is less certain because it had overseas members and also seems to have conflated people it referred to as its supporters and subscribers with its formal members. According to Richard Jebb, the first chairman of the Club, it had

³⁹ Pugh, *The Tories*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 5 May 1922 and 3 May 1935.

130,000 ‘members’ in 1915 but it seems more likely that the true membership figure was much less than this; Smith records only 32,506 members in 1922.⁴² All the other eight imperial activist groups still extant at the outbreak of the war in 1914 had memberships of less than about 10,000 except for the League of the Empire which claimed 23,000. One can reasonably conclude therefore that the total number of people belonging to imperial activist groups in 1914 was between one and one and a half million, of which more than half belonged to the Primrose League. Clearly any subsequent movement in the Primrose League’s membership would have had a disproportionate effect on the totality of imperial activism; as already noted, after the First World War its membership declined.

The demise of the Tariff Reform League in 1922, even though its members were encouraged to join the Empire Development Union, is a further important factor in the changing nature of imperial activist membership after 1918. Although new imperial activist groups emerged in the inter-war years, they were relatively small with memberships usually much less than 20,000. Conversely, membership of the Junior Imperial League grew to 250,000 by 1929 and Beaverbrook’s Empire Crusade claimed 250,000 members in 1930. These figures, however, should be interpreted cautiously as indicators of the level of commitment to imperial activism. Tensions between the political work and social activities in JIL branches increased as the latter grew, and although its banal imperialism continued, it emerged more strongly as an electoral resource and political training ground for the Tory party thus, arguably, blurring its imperial focus. Beaverbrook’s claim is specious: ‘membership’ meant completing and returning, without a subscription, a coupon published in his national newspapers thereby supporting his campaign for imperial preference. In sum, therefore, it is probably right to conclude that the peak of imperial activist membership occurred in the period between 1914 and 1922. This appears to be inconsistent with the suggestion made earlier that the Edwardian period saw most interest in the empire but two factors help to reconcile the two statements. First, even though several organisations were formed in the period, reflecting strong imperial enthusiasm, it may have taken them some years to build membership. Secondly, it is important to note that claimed membership figures do not necessarily

⁴² *United Empire*, 6 (September 1915), 650 and Adele Smith, *The Royal Over-Seas League: From Empire into Commonwealth, a History of the First 100 Years* (London, 2010), p. 141.

correlate with the level of active interest in the empire. Thus, for example, the reported membership of the TRL in 1913 was over 200,000 and yet by 1922 it was defunct. Although it suggested to its members that they join the Empire Development Union, few did. Thus one may conclude that a substantial number of activists in the early 1920s ceased to belong to an imperial organisation and that the peak of imperial activist membership had passed. With declining membership of the Primrose League also a substantial factor, it is likely that total activist membership between the wars never exceeded one and a half million. How significant, however, in the nation's affairs was the total membership of imperial activist groups in Britain? A brief comparison with labour and women's organisations of a political or quasi-political nature may be helpful in setting it in the context of the total adult population of the United Kingdom in the interwar period of approximately 30 million.

In the 1920s trade union membership was just under two million and rose to almost three million by 1939.⁴³ Total membership of major women's groups in the 1930s was of the same order: Labour Party Women's Section (250,000); Mothers' Union (538,000); National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (54,000); National Federation of Women's Institutes (238,000); Women's Co-operative Guild (90,000) and Women's Unionist Movement (940,000), together totalling just over 2 million.⁴⁴ Numerical equivalence does not necessarily imply equality in any other respect, particularly in gaining publicity or impact for a particular cause. The above comparison of membership does, however, provide some indication of the salience of imperial activism in Britain. Furthermore, awareness of the trade union movement, of women's interests and of imperial activism was not confined to members; their families and friends would also have had their attention drawn to these organisations. However, awareness of imperial matters is not the same as caring about them. John Julius Norwich recalled the 1920s when he wrote that 'Empire was all around us, celebrated on our biscuit tins, chronicled in our cigarette cards, part of the fabric of our lives.' He is arguably wrong, however, to conclude

⁴³ Butler and Sloman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1979*, p. 337.

⁴⁴ Catriona Beaumont, 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship, 1918-1950s' in Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001) pp. 262-77, quoted in Samantha Clements, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Social Activity: the Role and Importance of Local Women's Organisations, Nottingham, 1918-1969' (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2008).

from this that ‘we were all imperialists then’.⁴⁵ It was the million or so people who belonged to imperialists groups at that time who were more definitely the imperialists in society, whether they ate biscuits or not.

It is important, therefore, in assessing to what extent the British Empire mattered to people in Britain, to distinguish between being aware of it, interested in it, and actively caring about it. As noted earlier, members of imperial activist groups were drawn from all social classes with the working classes being particularly evident in the Primrose League, the Women’s Guild of Empire and the Junior Imperial League. Although overall membership of the JIL grew in the inter-war years, the falling membership of the Primrose League and the demise of the WGE suggest a decline in the number of working-class imperial activists. This does not necessarily mean, however, a decline in interest in, or awareness of, the Empire. For example, as John Mackenzie has noted, 27 million people visited the Wembley Exhibition in 1924 and 1925. He attributes this in part to the announcement of the construction of ‘a great national sports [football] ground’ at the site, thus drawing the attention of working class people, through their love of football, to the Exhibition.⁴⁶ A day spent at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, however, lacks the strong evidence of actively caring about the Empire that membership of an imperial activist group provides. Such membership was a deeper experience because it was repetitive, not a single event like a day at an exhibition, or celebrating Empire Day once a year. As Rose has observed, ‘working-class memoirs frequently mention Empire Day [but] they also reveal that these celebrations did little to enhance awareness of the colonies’.⁴⁷ The view, therefore, that working class people in the twentieth century ‘generally brought a healthy apathy to imperial issues’ [emphasis added]⁴⁸ seems correct, even though there may have been a substantial number of them in the Primrose League, and Beaverbrook’s campaign elicited a notable response from his *Express* readers, for example.

One of the difficulties of identifying working class interest in the British Empire is that they lack prominence in the records of the time. The ordinary member

⁴⁵ John Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, (Manchester, 1986), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Mackenzie, ‘The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain’, p. 214.

⁴⁷ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, p. 338.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 335.

of an imperial interest group, of whatever class, received little personal publicity and this can lead to a distorted understanding of the levels of participation in imperial activism of different social classes. There is, however, clear evidence of the involvement of upper and middle class people in imperial activism because they were the founders and leaders of imperial activist organisations and thus are readily identified in the reports and publications of activist groups and in the press.

From the latter years of the nineteenth century until at least immediately after the First World War the leadership of many imperial activist groups was permeated by peers. These included, for example, Lord Bury (Royal Colonial Institute), Lord Randolph Churchill (Primrose League), Lord Rosebery (Imperial Federation League), Lord Avebury (British Empire League), the Duke of Westminster (ISAA) and the Duke of Sutherland (Tariff Reform League). Many of the groups also had Members of Parliament in leadership roles: W.E. Forster (Imperial Federation League) and James Lowther (UETL), for example. It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasise the predominance of peers and MPs in initiating imperial activism. The founders of several groups were not parliamentarians. For example, the Victoria League was founded by 'socially and politically elite' women: Mrs Ord Marshall, the widow of a senior civil servant, founded the League of the Empire; the Round Table was established by young alumni of Oxford University; Evelyn Wrench, a journalist, began the Overseas Club; Howard d'Egville, a barrister, was an important figure in the Imperial Federation (Defence) League and the ERDC; and Frederick Pollock, lawyer and academic, was highly influential in the IFL and League of the Empire. These people were from the middle class, not the peerage.

The leadership of activist groups was upper or middle class even where their memberships included working class people. The Primrose League is a clear example. Another is the Junior Imperial League whose founding members were aspiring middle class men but although some working class people joined, more especially in the inter-war years, their central leadership remained largely a combination of peers, MPs and middle class administrators, with aristocrats such as Lord Windsor, Lord Stanley and Lord Burghley at the highest level. However, working class people, such as Bernard Braine and Patricia Hornsby-Smith did emerge as senior figures in the organisation of the League in the 1930s, first at a

branch and then at a regional level. A notable exception to upper class leadership was the Women's Guild of Empire; its leaders, of a working class membership, were middle class suffragettes. The British Commonwealth Union was also middle class in its leadership. One can reasonably conclude, therefore, that although working class people were members of some imperial activist groups they had little part in the leadership of them, especially before the First World War.

In conclusion, membership of imperial activist groups was drawn from all classes with upper and middle class people providing leadership. Those, of whatever class, who formed and led imperial activist groups and those who simply joined them as ordinary members did so for a number of basic reasons. The main ones included active attempts to change the governance, defence or trade relationships of the Empire; expressions of general feelings of support for it; and simple celebration of its existence. Some who joined groups such as the India Defence League, the Indian Empire Society and the League of Empire Loyalists, sought to prevent change. Others joined groups as much for the social activities as the political ones that were available, particularly in the cases of the Primrose League and the Junior Imperial League. All these reasons for being a member of a group were expressed with varying intensity and ranged between 'hot' and 'banal' imperialism. Furthermore, the interest of groups in imperial ideas varied over time. Thus greater unity of governance and the formal integration of defence fell away in the period between the late Victorian years and the end of the First World War, leaving the idea of imperial preference as the most sustained of the political imperial themes. The geographical focus of imperial activists, within the vast diversity of the Empire, was narrow; great and sustained interest was shown in the Dominions, much less in India until the 1930s, and little in the dependencies (with the exception of the League of Empire Loyalists after the Second World War). This concentration on relations between Britain and the Dominions suggests that nineteenth century idea of a Greater Britain of the United Kingdom and the Dominions lingered persistently, even if unwittingly, in the minds of imperial activists at least until the Second World War.

How much the Empire mattered to the British public has been extensively debated by historians. In discussing in this chapter the closely related question of

who cared about the Empire, it has been suggested that the totality of those who cared most about the Empire, that is, activists who belonged to groups, probably never exceeded one and a half million people. This is a substantial body of people and comparable to the size of the contemporary trades union and women's movements. However, whatever the number of people in Britain who cared about the Empire, it is important to recognise that many activists did so only in particular ways and about particular geographical parts of it. The question of how much the Empire mattered, therefore, is not readily susceptible to a general answer. One needs to consider, as has been attempted in this chapter, which part of the Empire mattered, which particular imperial issues motivated imperial activists, the intensity of their interest and how these changed over time.

Conclusion

This thesis has surveyed twenty-seven twentieth century imperial activist groups and builds on the work of Andrew Thompson, John Mackenzie, Andrew Marrison and Matthew Hendley, all of whom have looked at multiple imperial activist groups, though without investigating particular ones in great depth. The main content is a detailed analysis of the Junior Imperial League and the League of Empire Loyalists. The JIL has been studied little by historians, a significant oversight because it was a substantial political organisation. The LEL has been examined mainly by those who are interested in its apparently fascist qualities rather than its specifically imperial dimension.

The thesis has shown that the JIL was an important, imperially-minded political organisation, increasingly integrated into the Conservative party, and one that expressed its imperialism in commonplace, 'banal' ways. It was significant in electoral politics, being effective in supporting the Conservatives at local elections, by-elections and general elections. At the 1929 general election, for example, it assembled over 100,000 members throughout the country to assist in the campaign. It provided a training ground for young politicians, male and female, and provided them with opportunities to become local and national politicians. It did not confine its activities to politics but offered a wide range of social activities as a means of drawing young people into politics. Although its central leadership was generally patrician in composition, its membership, which had grown to about 250,000 by the early 1930s, was drawn from all classes with a substantial proportion from the working class. It provided a sound foundation for the Young Conservatives immediately after the Second World War.

In contrast, the LEL, an organisation whose largely middle-class membership never exceeded a few thousand, opposed the leadership of the Conservative party. This thesis has argued that it should not be seen simply as an extreme right-wing, even fascist, organisation. Its imperialism was a key element of its politics. It believed that the Empire was an essential part of Britishness and used disruptive publicity-seeking stunts to try to bring pressure to bear on politicians by alerting the

British public to what it saw as the acute need to preserve Britain's Empire, sovereignty and global power. It was ineffective, not only because of its marginalised relationship with the Conservative party but also because, after the Second World War, only a small part of society, mainly drawn from the upper-middle classes, cared much about the Empire. Furthermore, its imperialism was anachronistic, rooted in late-Victorian imperialism and imbued with extreme racism. The belief that the 'white' Dominions were a superior part of the Empire and that dependencies were incapable of self-government became untenable. In pursuing its out-dated ideas, the LEL was an exponent of 'hot' imperialism in the post-war period that was very different from the 'banal' imperialism of the JIL in the inter-war years.

In addition to these findings about the JIL and LEL, important in themselves, the thesis has also extended the debate about the awareness of the British Empire in British society by setting them in the context of imperial activism and the debate about the awareness of the British Empire in British society. Other methods for assessing the effect of the Empire on British society have been used by historians and the conclusions they reach vary greatly. The so-called minimalists say it had very little impact; the 'maximalists', that it was ubiquitous. It has been argued here that these approaches set up a false polarity. The debate over the significance of empire in British society is more subtle than a straightforward choice between the omnipresence of empire and its near-absence. The very fact that a gallimaufry of imperial activist groups existed, including the JIL and the LEL with their contrasting natures, shows that many people in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century cared about the British Empire in diverse and multivalent ways. Membership of imperial activist groups reached between one and two million during the period, a figure comparable to those of trades unions and women's groups. Furthermore, we need to understand how this awareness of the Empire mattered, to whom, and in what ways. Imperial activist groups and those who belonged to them are an important source for considering these issues. Neither in the sense of their social characteristics nor in their concerns with the Empire were they a homogeneous, monolithic body of people; the thesis has described this diversity.

The thesis has argued that many imperial activists had a perception of Empire that was narrowly Anglo-Saxon in character. Extensive and sustained interest was shown in the Dominions, much less in India until the 1930s, and little in the

dependencies, with the exception of the League of Empire Loyalists after the Second World War. Thus for many imperial activists, 'the Empire' meant the Dominions. This focus on the Dominions had been evident in the late nineteenth century when the idea of integrating Britain and the Dominions politically, emerged under the sobriquet 'Greater Britain'. By 1918, however, political integration in practice was a dead issue but nevertheless the Dominions remained the principal focus of imperial activist groups and can still be seen in the ideology of the LEL as late as the 1950s. Thus, although it would be wrong to ignore the dependencies entirely in telling the story of imperial activism, Andrew Thompson's conclusion that in late Victorian and Edwardian times interest in the Empire was 'skewed...towards the settler colonies' can be extended to the middle of the twentieth century.¹

The emphasis on the Dominions was also apparent in defence matters. The Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee, the Round Table and the British Empire League illustrate this, although they were not large organisations. The Committee disbanded in 1906 and although the BEL lasted until 1955, broadening its remit, the feasibility of formally and permanently integrating the defence of Britain and her Dominions had greatly diminished after the end of the First World War. Defence was thus a relatively short-lived and weak strain of imperial activism.

Trade, however, was a much stronger and more long-lasting concern of imperial activists than defence. It emerged in imperial activism in the 1890s when some members of the defunct IFL formed the United Empire Trade League; was carried forward from 1903 into the 1920s by the Tariff Reform League and its successor the Empire Development Union; and was the principal purpose of the British Commonwealth Union, the Empire Industries Association and Beaverbrook's confrontational Empire Crusade in the 1920s and 1930s. Trade, with the Dominions, was therefore the most notable of the six main topics that activists cared about. By comparison, education, expressed by the League of the Empire and the Empire Day Movement, and concern with Anglo-Saxon issues of 'kith and kin', favoured by the Overseas Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, were relatively minor issues. The former two organisations operated from the early years of the twentieth

¹ Thompson, 'Thinking Imperially?', p351.

century until after the Second World War, but the latter, founded in Edwardian times, had both disappeared by 1922.

This thesis has described the division of imperial activist groups into pressure groups and interest groups, and has drawn attention to the social nature of some groups. Groups which expressed concern with the specific areas of governance, defence, trade, and education were invariably pressure groups, that is, they sought to change some aspect of the Empire, and sometimes to resist change, in the cases of the India Defence League, the Indian Empire Society and the League of Empire Loyalists. They were, not surprisingly, therefore political groups, rather than social ones. Groups with a non-specific, general concern for imperial matters were usually interest groups, that is, they sought to celebrate and enjoy the Empire, not to change it. Such groups included the Royal Colonial Institute, the Primrose League, the Victoria League and the Empire Parliamentary Association. They tended to be more long-lived than pressure groups with specific concerns, perhaps because the latter had unachievable plans or sometimes, as in the case of the ISAA, saw their ideas become reality. Generally speaking, pressure groups were political groups; interest groups were social groups.

There were exceptions to this, most notably the Primrose League, which was an interest group with both political and social elements, and the Junior Imperial League, which was also both political and social, and, though largely an interest group, applied pressure in the inter-war years to the Conservative party over India and imperial preference. The JIL, this thesis has argued, displayed 'banal', or commonplace, imperialism in which its purpose was mainly to celebrate and enjoy the Empire. It also illustrates that groups were active in areas that were not directly imperial; it became an effective resource for the Conservative Party in elections and as a training ground for young Tory politicians. The JIL was not alone among imperial activist groups in being close to the Conservative Party but it was particularly so, and the thesis draws attention to its significance in Tory politics and to the relevance of the Empire to Tory policy.

In contrast, the League of Empire Loyalists, which both attacked and courted the Conservatives, was an exponent of 'hot' imperialism. The thesis has argued that the pre-occupation with the *fascisant* qualities of the LEL should not be allowed to

mask its imperialism and its significant place in the spectrum of imperial activist groups. Thus, taken together, the JIL and the LEL delimit the two extremes of intensity of imperial feeling that may be designated respectively as 'infra-imperialism' and 'ultra-imperialism'. They demonstrate the importance, when assessing attitudes to the Empire, of understanding the different ways in which imperialism was expressed.

The thesis has also considered the question of the social classes in imperial activism. Almost all groups were led by an elite, that is, people possessing a combination of wealth, status or power. Such people were often drawn from the aristocracy, from those who had been elected or appointed to parliament, from businessmen and professionals. Imperial activist groups, however, had members drawn from all social classes. It has long been understood that the Primrose League had working-class members but this thesis has shown that this is also true of the Junior Imperial League. It is interesting to note that these two organisations were larger than any other imperial activist groups and also, unusually, were interest groups with a strong social element. Perhaps it is the case that working-class imperialists preferred to celebrate the Empire, in a social setting, rather than to set about changing it through political campaigning.

This thesis has argued that imperialism was neither ubiquitous nor absent in British society from 1900 to 1967. The evidence in this thesis has been assembled from the organised activities of more than one million people who felt strongly enough about the Empire, albeit in various ways and with a range of intensity of feeling, to give up their own time and money to pursue an imperial cause. That they did so in diverse ways is demonstrated in this thesis by its survey of twentieth century imperial activist groups and the detailed examination of the JIL and the LEL, two organisations whose 'banal' and 'hot' imperialism lay at the opposite extremes of imperial activism: the former was permeated by Empire but not dominated by it; the latter, was extremist and obsessed with the belief that without the Empire there could be no satisfactory form of Britishness.

Appendix 1. Officers of the Junior Imperial League

President

Lord Castlereagh (1906-1921) later Lord Londonderry

Lord Windsor (1921-1933) later Earl of Plymouth

Lord Stanley (1933-1938)

Lord Burghley (1938-

Chairman

Arthur du Cros (1906-1907)

Henry Imbert-Terry (1907-1927) later knighted

Lord Stanley (1927-1933)

Lord Burghley (1933-1937)

Lord Dunglass (1937-1945) later Sir Alec Douglas-Home

Hon. Secretary

A.E. Southall (1906-1907)

G.O. Borwick (1907-1908)

Herbert Browne (1909)

H.I.P. Hallett (1909-1939)

Hon. Treasurer

C.H. Hoare (-1908)

S.G. Sampson (1909) (joint)

F. Danford Thomas (1909-1936)

Viscount Hinchinbrooke

N. Ker Lindsay (1936-)

Organising Secretary

W. Kiddell Moore (1909-1911)

H.H. Cannell (1912-1926)

Capt. A.G. Mitchell (1926-)

Appendix 2. Members of the National Council and Executive Committee of the League of Empire Loyalists, 1955/56

Andrews, Sir Ernest H. KB CBE (1873-1961) Mayor of Christchurch, New Zealand in 1940s; ed. Ashburton Public School and Canterbury University College, Christchurch.

Armstrong, T. Resident in New Zealand.

Athoe, G.B.J., Major. A.Inst. N.A. M.Inst.R.A.

Attenborough, B.M. Mrs.

Belam, I. Mrs.

Belfrage, C. Mrs. Resident in Kenya.

Blake, M.A. Resident in Australia.

Bridges, T.W. Lt. Com. RNR (retd.) Resident in Canada.

W.Austen Brooks. Son of W.Collin Brooks (1893-1959) who was editor of Truth (1940-1952); ed. Balliol College, Oxford. Journalist.

Buchan, 15th Earl. (1878-1960) Ed. Harrow. Formerly Lieut. in Scots Guards; served in South Africa 1899-1902 and in First World War in Egypt, Salonica and Palestine. President of the Service for Economic Action ('working to establish the supremacy of the people over their institutions' (Conservative Party Archive, CCO3/4/75)).

Burdett-Coutts, Martin.

Butler, Eric D. Resident in Australia. Journalist with Melbourne Argus; editor of New Times of Melbourne. Director of the Australian League of Rights. Secretary of the Social Credit Organisation. Author.

Butt, T.B. Lt-Col. Commanding officer (1936-39) of 2nd battalion KOYLI.

Byng-Morris, Mrs. I.

Chambers-Hunter, W.K.A.J. Leading BUF activist in Aberdeen in nineteen-thirties. Author of *British Union and Social Credit*.

Clarkson, M. Mrs. (c.1894-)

Clifford, Frank. Journalist. Detained under Defence Regulation 18B. Deputy Chairman of the National Front.

Collis, Guy. Local government councillor.

Couchman, V. Miss Resident in South Africa.

Cowper-Essex, C.S. JP.

Creagh-Scott, J. Lt-Col. DSO OBE. Chairman, The Farmers' Action Council.
Author of *Hidden Government*. Advisory Chairman of the Service for Economic Action.

Elliott-Smith, C.H. Air Commodore AFC. (1889-1994) (sic) Resident in South Africa. Retired in 1944. Ed. Bedford School. Army officer (1914-15) before transferring to the RFC. Served in Mesopotamia in First World War and South Africa in Second World War.

Fraser Harris, D.S., Lt-Col.

Elizabeth, Lady Freeman. (c.1911-?) Daughter of Ernest Richmond, director of antiquities in Palestine (1927-37). Widow of Sir Wilfrid Freeman (1888-1953) who was ed. Rugby School and RMC Sandhurst and who worked (1942-45) at Ministry of Aircraft Production under Lord Beaverbrook.

Geneve, C. Resident in Southern Rhodesia.

Gough, Hubert, General Sir Ed. Eton and RMC Sandhurst. Fought at Ladysmith in 1900; involved in the Curragh incident in 1914. Commanded Fifth Army at Ypres 1917. Commander of London zone of Home Guard in Second World War.

Gray, N.W.H. Resident in Singapore.

Greene, M.C. Miss. MA. Organising secretary of the LEL. Daughter of Ben Greene, a cousin of Graham Greene, who left the Labour Party in 1938 and helped the Duke of Bedford to set up the British Peoples Party. Graham Greene's father was headmaster of Berkhamstead, the public school A.K. Chesterton attended contemporaneously with Ben Greene (1913-15).

Hartley, J. Resident in New Zealand.

Heanley, C.M., MB. Resident in Southern Rhodesia.

Holbrook, J.R.

Holden, Joseph. FNICS. Local government councillor.

Jeune, R.D.

Jordan, Colin. MA. Midlands organiser of the LEL. Resigned in 1957 to found the White Defence League.

Klassen, A.T. Resident in Canada.

Lazarus, David.

Leather, R.T. Gp-Capt. Commander of No.150 and No. 103 RAF squadrons in 1939.

Llewellyn, G.J. Cmdr. RN. Resident in Kenya.

Mackay, S.

Mackey, Aiden. Journalist.

Mackesy, P.J. Maj.-Gen. CB DSO MC. (1883-1956) Retired from the army in 1940 after controversial involvement in the Narvik campaign. Ed. St. Paul's School and RMA Woolwich. Served in South Africa in the First World War, Murmansk (1919), India (1927-30) and Palestine (1937).

Marriott, Peter. (c.1924-) Ed. Eton and Magdelene College, Oxford. Founded the New Conservative Movement.

Mew, Mrs. Joyce. Chairman of the Housewives' League.

Nesbit, C Mrs. Resident in Canada.

Noakes, A.W. Resident in Australia.

Oddie, G.S. (ca 1896-?) Air Commodore. DFC AFC (1895-1984). Ed. Wimbledon College and University of London. Served in the army in First World War before joining the Royal Flying Corps. Won the DFC in India in 1919. Commander, Empire Central Flying School (1942-44).

Ogilvie, G. FRIBA. Resident in Kenya.

Palmer, Sir Richmond, (1877-1958) Ed. Oundle and Trinity College, Cambridge. Barrister. Governor and C-in-C Gambia (1930-33) and Cyprus (1933-39)

Pile, George.

Raven, Alice Miss.

Roberts, B.P. Major. Resident in Kenya.

Rogers, A. Capt. OBE.

Stevens, F.W. Resident in New Zealand.

Stewart, T.S.

Stokes, L.A. APCA.

Tillett, George.

Tozer, Derek.

Waring, J.M.E. Tea planter in Ceylon.

Wemyss, I.B. Mrs. Resident in Southern Rhodesia.

Young, L. Wing Commander.

Note: These brief biographical details have been compiled mainly from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, *Who Was Who*, *The Times* and the Conservative Party Archive at the Bodleian Library.

Appendix 3. Conservative Backbenchers

Identifying the extreme Empire Stalwarts (ultra-imperialists)

Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew considered the following EDMs, one or more of which was signed by 64 Empire Stalwarts:

EDM 101A/1955 Anti-Common Market Amendment.

EDM 28A/1956 Anti-European unity Amendment.

EDM 110/1955 Increased Empire preference.

EDM 5/1957 (actually EDM4) Empire trade before Free Trade Area.

EDM 101A and EDM 28A were 'more extreme' in terms of support for Empire; EDM 110 and EDM 4 were 'less extreme'.

They state that 'Nine MPs signed at least one of these two Amendments [i.e 101A and 28A] and eight of them can be regarded as constituting the ultra-imperialist wing of the Conservative party in the House of Commons'.¹ By examining the EDMs we can establish that only two MPs (Legge-Bourke and Green) signed 101A and seven signed 28A (Legge-Bourke, Harvey, Lucas, Tufton-Beamish, Biggs-Davison, Williams and McAdden). Finer *et al* tell us only that the group was led by Legge Bourke and we may reasonably conclude therefore that these are the eight ultra-imperialists.

Biographical details of the ultra-imperialists²

Beamish, Major Tufton Victor Hamilton, MC. Son of Rear Adm. T.P.H.

Beamish. Born 1917; ed. Stowe and RMC Sandhurst. Served in Palestine 1938-39 and in France, Belgium, Far East, N.Africa and Italy 1939-45. Honorary colonel in TA since 1951. Director of companies. MP since 1945.

Biggs-Davison, John. Son of Major J.N.Biggs-Davison. Born 1918; ed. Clifton College and Magdelene College, Oxford. Commissioned in Royal Marines 1939;

¹ Finer, Berrington and Bartholomew, *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59* p186.

² *Dod's Parliamentary Companion 1955* (London: Business Directories Ltd, 1955)

Indian Civil Service 1942; Liaison officer Cox's Bazaar; Commandant Border Military Police 1946-48. MP since 1951.

Green, Alan. Son of Edward Green. Born 1911; ed. Brighton College. Served in Royal Artillery as Private, later Major, 1940-46. Director of companies. MP since 1955.

Harvey, Air Commodore Arthur Vere, CBE. Son of Arthur William Harvey. Born 1906; ed. Framlingham College. Served with RAF 1925-30. Hon. Major-General Southern Chinese Airforce 1934. MP since 1945.

Legge-Bourke, Major Edward Alexander Henry. Son of the late N.W.H. Legge-Bourke and Lady Victoria Forester. Born 1914; ed. Eton and RMC. Royal Horse Guards; served in Greece 1941 and Western desert 1942; ADC to British Ambassador in Cairo 1941-42. MP since 1945.

Lucas, P.B. DSO DFC. Son of P.M. Lucas; ed. Stowe and Pembroke College, Cambridge. Formerly journalist now company director. Served with RAF 1939-46 reaching rank of Wing-Commander. Awarded Croix de Guerre. MP since 1950.

McAdden, Stephen James. Son of William John McAdden. Born 1907; ed. Salesian School, Battersea. Export sales manager. MP since 1950.

Williams, Paul. Son of Sam. O. Williams. Born 1922; ed. Marlborough and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Exporter, travelled in Canada, USA, South Africa, Europe and Scandinavia. MP since 1953.

Appendix 4: Biographical details³ of members of the Expanding Commonwealth Group

(all were MPs in the 1955-59 Parliament except Charles Longbottom)

Hon. Patrick Maitland (Chairman) Son of W.W.Maitland CVO OBE. Born 1903; ed. Royal Naval College and Dartmouth. Lt-Commander, retired 1934, recalled 1939. Gunnery officer on Staff of Admiral Commanding Submarines. JP. War correspondent, Eastern Europe and Far East.

(Henry Frederick) Lawrence Turner (Hon.Treasurer) Son of late G.F. Turner, architect. Born 1905; ed. Radley. Director of five companies. PoW Far East.

John Biggs-Davison (Hon. Secretary) See Appendix 2.

William Aitken Son of Joseph Mauns Aitken of Toronto. Born 1905; married daughter of Lord Rugby. Served in Second World War as RAF fighter pilot

Sir Albert Braithwaite DSO MC Son of Albert Braithwaite, Lord Mayor of Leeds 1921. Born 1893; ed. Woodhouse Grove School and Leeds University. Engineer and Company Director. Served in Second World War.

Bernard Braine Son of Arthur Ernest Braine. Born 1914. National Vice Chairman Junior Imperial League 1938-45. N. Staffordshire Regiment 1940. Major 1943. Served in W.Africa, N.W.Europe, S.E.Asia. Lt-Col 1946; on staff of Lord Mountbatten. Journalist and Company Director.

Anthony Fell Son of late Cmdr. David Mark Fell RN. Born in Britain 1914 but ed. Tauranga District High School NZ. Engineer.

Viscount Hinchingbrooke Son of 9th Earl of Sandwich. Born 1906; ed. Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Served in France 1940, Major 1942. Treasurer Junior Imperial and Constitutional League (1934-35) Company Director.

Hon.Greville Howard Son of 19th Earl of Suffolk. Born 1909; ed. Eton and Sandhurst. Lt-Commander RNVR, served at sea in destroyers throughout 1939-45 war. Mayor of Westminster 1946-7.

Hon. James Lindsay Son of late (27th) Earl of Crawford and Balcarres. Ed. Eton and Magdelene College, Oxford. Farmed in South Africa before Second World War; travelled in Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda. Served in KFRC and as Major in Commando Corps; invalided 1944.

Charles Longbottom Prospective parliamentary candidate.

³ Compiled from *Dod's Parliamentary Companion 1957* (London: Business Directories Ltd., 1957) and the Biggs-Davison Papers, House of Lords Record Office

Angus Maude Economist and writer. Ed. Rugby and Oxford. Served in RASC in N. Africa 1939-45 (PoW for 3 years).

Sir Roland Robinson Son of Roland Walkden Robinson, Solicitor. Born 1907; ed. Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Barrister. Wing-Commander RAFVR 1943.

Ronald Russell Son of J. Stanley Russell. Born 1904; ed. Haileybury and Caius College, Cambridge. Author and journalist. Served in Second World War. Editor of Empire and Commonwealth Year Book.

Sir James Henderson Stewart Bt. Son of late Matthew Deas Stewart. Born 1897; ed. Morrison's Academy and University of Edinburgh. Capt Royal Artillery (TA) retd. Served with BEF 1917-19 and Royal Artillery 1940-41.

John Tilney Son of Col. R. H. Tilney DSO. Born 1907; ed. Eton and Magdalen College, Oxford. Served overseas 1939-45. Commander 359 Med. Regiment Royal Artillery, TA.

Major Patrick Wall MC Son of Henry Benedict Wall. Born 1916; ed. Downside. Served with Royal Marines 1935-50, and with US Navy.

Paul Williams Ed. Marlborough and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Served in RAF in Second World War. Company Director.

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